

Defining and measuring training activity

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Foreword

The UK Commission for Employment and Skills is a social partnership, led by Commissioners from large and small employers, trade unions and the voluntary sector. Our mission is to raise skill levels to help drive enterprise, create more and better jobs and promote economic growth. Our strategic objectives are to:

- Provide outstanding labour market intelligence which helps businesses and people make the best choices for them;
- Work with businesses to develop the best market solutions which leverage greater investment in skills;
- Maximise the impact of employment and skills policies and employer behaviour to support jobs and growth and secure an internationally competitive skills base.

These strategic objectives are supported by a research programme that provides a robust evidence base for our insights and actions and which draws on good practice and the most innovative thinking. The research programme is underpinned by a number of core principles including the importance of: ensuring **'relevance'** to our most pressing strategic priorities; **'salience'** and effectively translating and sharing the key insights we find; **international benchmarking** and drawing insights from good practice abroad; **high quality** analysis which is leading edge, robust and action orientated; being **responsive** to immediate needs as well as taking a longer term perspective. We also work closely with key partners to ensure a **co-ordinated** approach to research.

As part of our underpinning labour market information work, the UK Commission manages a suite of large-scale employer surveys. A key item of interest in these surveys is the data on employers' training activities. This study is a detailed exploration of the questions on training used in both surveys: do employers relate to the concepts we are using? Do the questions accurately capture the reality of employer behaviour?

The research shows that whilst employers do not use the descriptors of 'on-the-job' and 'off-the-job' training themselves, they understand and were able consistently to apply these definitions to their own workplaces. The research

tested a number of alternative formulations of the training questions but there was not one which generally thought to be more useful and easier to apply to their workplace. Because of this we are reassured; the data we produce on training accurately reflect the training position amongst UK employers.

Sharing the findings of our research and engaging with our audience is important to further develop the evidence on which we base our work. Evidence Reports are our chief means of reporting our detailed analytical work. Each Evidence Report is accompanied by an executive summary. All of our outputs can be accessed on the UK Commission's website at www.ukces.org.uk

But these outputs are only the beginning of the process and we will be continually looking for mechanisms to share our findings, debate the issues they raise and extend their reach and impact.

We hope you find this report useful and informative. If you would like to provide any feedback or comments, or have any queries please e-mail info@ukces.org.uk, quoting the report title or series number.

Lesley Giles
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UK Commission for Employment and Skills

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1 Executive Summary

When asking about incidence of training, the skills surveys for all four nations of the UK make the distinction between “on-the-job” and “off-the-job” training. This distinction has been made in part to reflect that whilst all training activity is of interest from a policy perspective, off-the-job training has been particularly critical in terms of its likely impact on productivity, skills improvement and raising qualification levels.

The Defining and Measuring Training study primarily seeks to further understanding of how employers view and classify their training activity, and which activities they consider to come under the heading “training”. This will then feed into the questionnaire design for future activities in the UK Commission employer survey suite, ensuring that the questions regarding training are well understood by employers and are capturing accurately the incidence of training among employers. The study also provides an opportunity to look more closely at the issues of underemployment and understanding of the government’s role in Apprenticeships to better understand these issues with a view to developing new and existing skills survey questions on these topics.

Training

Underpinning employers’ definitions of training is the principle that the purpose should be to acquire knowledge to ultimately make the employee better at their job. It is clear when we dig deeper however that the term “training” means different things to different people when it comes to the sort of activity this actually covers. The main grey area is where “on-the-job training” meets simply “doing the job”; some activities whose main aim is to improve the skills of the employee are not captured by the survey measures because they are too close to the day to day work of the employee and thus would not be considered as “training” by the individual, their managers, or their organisations’ HR structure.

Employers are unlikely to make the “on-the-job” and “off-the-job” distinction themselves when thinking about the training at their establishment. They are more likely to use terms such as “on-site and off-site”, “in-house or college based”, or to distinguish based on whether the training leads to a certificate or not. They also respond well to the concepts “internal and external” training, although there is some disagreement as to whether this relates to the location of the training or who delivers it.

However, once the full definitions of on- and off-the-job training were read out, the majority of employers were able to understand what activities fall into which category and answer accordingly. When trying to define the concepts themselves, employers often placed more emphasis on whether the training was in the same building as the employee's normal workplace or on who delivers the training than the definitions given in the skills survey (which relate to whether training takes place at the individual's immediate work position or not). This was a particular issue for on-the-job training, which was a term that many employers do use but often with a slightly different meaning to that given in our definitions, for example "learning whilst doing the job" and experience gathered over time.

Underemployment

Underemployment is when employees have more skills and qualifications than are required for the job role they are employed in. This may represent inefficiency: in the skills system (as training has been funded that was not necessary), or in the business strategy of the employer (who could generate more value if their employees' skills were utilised more fully). Some have questioned whether underemployment might have a detrimental effect in terms of productivity and morale on the employee in question or the organisation they work for. Incorporating questions on this issue into skills surveys has proved challenging, and this qualitative study is intended to inform this ongoing process, feeding into questions on the prevalence of underemployment, the reasons it occurs and the impact it has.

Whilst some of the employers reported having employees who were over-skilled for the role, amongst the sample interviewed for the current study it was by no means widespread. Employers find it easiest to think about in terms of further or higher education qualifications obtained by individuals rather than in terms of particular skill sets. The most common reasons for underemployment are employees choosing a job role that fits their personal circumstances rather than their skills (for example, parents returning to work as teaching assistants to fit around looking after their children, or students working in a bar to fit around their studies); in this situation there is actually some benefit to the employer, such as a higher intelligence of workforce and the potential for skills sharing. On the other hand, a few mentioned more negative issues such as graduates unable to get a graduate role in the current job market; this can affect workforce motivation and lead to higher staff turnover.

Apprenticeships

Previous skills surveys have found discrepancies in the awareness of Apprenticeship schemes recognised by government depending on how the question was asked. Some exploratory work was carried out in the present survey to understand employers' knowledge and inform how the questions best be asked.

Whilst recognition of the term "apprenticeship" is widespread, knowledge of the government's involvement in them is less so. Whilst over half recognise that the government is involved in some way (particularly regarding the funding of Apprenticeships), very few can name any specific schemes. Most importantly in terms of the skills survey series, a notable number of employers who are aware of the government's involvement but are not aware of any schemes would say that they are aware of government recognised Apprenticeships if asked in that way.

How questions are developed on Apprenticeships for the UK-wide skill survey series will depend on what is deemed most important to measure. If questions focus on awareness of specific schemes, then the aggregate awareness across these schemes will tend to underplay awareness of the role that government plays in financing and arranging Apprenticeships as the data will exclude a sizeable number who are aware the government funds Apprenticeships but are not aware of the detail.

2 Introduction

2.1 Context and background

Although the UK remains the sixth largest economy, it faces significant challenges (and opportunities) from increasing competitive pressures: the effects of globalisation, ongoing technological developments, and changes in the pattern of consumer demand. A number of reports have focussed on the critical role of having a suitably skilled workforce in securing our future economic success and prosperity, while at the same time identifying that our performance in improving productivity, employment and skills lags behind our key economic competitors. The most recent comparative international data, for example, shows that the UK is ranked 11th in terms of our 'productivity rate', outside the top quartile of OECD countries¹.

The UK Commission for Employment and Skills (UK Commission) has as its key aim to advise on policies and delivery, and to report on progress towards the ambition of making the UK a world-class leader in productivity, employment and skills by 2020. Its policy development seeks to be grounded in evidence-based analysis, and this requires high quality, reliable LMI that gives an accurate picture of activity and demand in the labour market. Employer skills surveys provide a key contribution to this evidence base.

Employer skills surveys have a long history in the UK. Prior to 2011 the four nations of the UK all ran separate surveys to measure skills shortages, skill gaps and training provision among employers in their country. In 2011 the UK Commission has led the development of a single, harmonised UK-wide survey ("Employer Skills Survey 2011" or "ESS2011"). This has presented an opportunity to review the key variables being measured to ensure that they are still relevant and that they provide reliable, robust data. This report focuses on questions asked about training and workforce development activity.

2.2 Objectives of the Defining and Measuring Training Activity study

The aim of the current study was to better understand how employers answer questions asked in the UK Commission's surveys about training and workforce development. This serves two broad purposes:

¹ UK Commission for Employment and Skills (2010) *Ambition 2020: World Class Skills and Jobs for the UK: The 2010 Report*, UKCES, Wath-upon-Deerne

- To help understand and contextualise how employers are answering the current 'standard' questions on training, and to help explain how the current findings should be interpreted.
- To inform thinking as to how questions on training and development should best be asked.

A particular focus of the research was to assess how well a key classification of training activity that has been used in most employer skills surveys – namely *off-the-job training* and *on-the-job training* – is understood by employers. This distinction has been made in part to reflect that, whilst all training activity is of interest from a policy perspective, off-the-job training has been regarded as particularly critical in the sense of it being seen as higher quality training in terms of its likely impact on productivity, skills improvement and raising qualification levels. Similar but non-identical wordings have been used in surveys around the home nations and abroad, including in Scotland's Scottish Employer Skills Survey (SESS), Northern Ireland's Northern Ireland Skills Monitoring Survey (NISMS), Wales' Future Skills Wales survey (FSW), and England's National Employer Skills Survey (NESS). The wording below is taken from the 2011 Employer Skills Survey, run by the UK Commission across the entire UK²:

- **Off-the-job training:** training undertaken 'away from the individual's immediate work position, whether on your premises or elsewhere'
- **On-the-job training:** activities at the individual's immediate work position 'that would be recognised as training by the staff, and not the sort of learning by experience which could take place all the time.'

The exploration of employer understanding of these terms covered such issues as: is this a way that employers naturally classify their training? Are there other classifications better attuned to how employers tend to think about their training and development activity? And even if the on- and off-the-job training distinction is not commonly used, is it one that is understood when explained to respondents – i.e. are different employers classifying the same sort of activities within each? The research also explored different ways of defining on- and off-the-job training to see if these were better understood, or preferred, by employers.

² At the time of writing, this survey was in fieldwork stage, with interviews taking place with 87,750 employers around the UK on recruitment issues, skills gaps and skills needs, training activity and expenditure, and business strategy. For more information, please see the UK Commission's website: <http://www.ukces.org.uk/uk-employer-skills-survey>

This study also examined some preliminary questions on the issue of underemployment, where employees are over-qualified and or over-skilled for the role they hold, and the impact this has on both employer and employee. This is with a view to including some questions on this issue in future employer surveys.

Finally, the study looked at the issue of apprenticeships to better understand how employers answer skills survey questions on this topic.

3 Methodology

A total of 40 in-depth discussions were carried out in person with employers, typically lasting from an hour to an hour and a quarter. Interviews were conducted with the most senior person at the site responsible for staff and staff issues, which is the same group as are targeted for the UK Commission's quantitative skills surveys.

A face-to-face approach was adopted because of the interview length and the depth of information required. However, a small number of interviews had to be conducted by telephone because of postponements to arranged interviews caused by a period of heavy snow during the fieldwork period in late 2010.

The topic guide used is appended (see Appendix 1). The key area was exploring understanding of off- and on-the-job training and other distinctions / classification (informal v. formal training, free v. paid for etc). In addition to this, the topic guide covered:

- Whether employers would consider a range of specific activities as training;
- How training is measured and recorded;
- What proportion of employers' staff could be described as underemployed and the reasons behind this;
- Understanding and awareness of government-recognised Apprenticeship schemes.

Employers were selected that had taken part in either the 2010 Employer Perspectives Survey (EPS) or the 2009 National Employers Skills Survey (NESS 2009). The sampling approach is described in detail in the rest of this section. It is important to note that the research did **not** aim to interview a representative cross-section of employers but intentionally targeted employers answering in specific ways on the training questions in EPS and NESS 2009 surveys. For this reason, *no results from this project should be inferred to be the views of UK employers as a whole, or of sub-groups or sectors of employers.*

Eleven pre-defined types of employer were identified for the research: seven different types of employers that trained, and four types that did not. These groups (shown in table 3.1) were selected on the basis of their having interesting combinations of responses and/or potentially unusual training patterns. They cover:

- A range of sizes of employers (care was taken to ensure that a spread of employer sizes were covered under both “trainer” and “non-trainer” headings);
- A variety of training behaviour (including non-trainers, off-the-job only and on-the-job only trainers, and those doing both types), allowing us to assess differences by type of trainer;
- Some unusual training patterns (e.g. a high proportion of on- or off-the-job spending among those doing both types, or those who claim they do not train but who do have a training plan or budget). Some of these groups were chosen on the basis that they potentially misunderstood the training questions in NESS 2009 and EPS 2010.

Table 3.1: Target groups

Target group	Sampling source	Interviews achieved
<i>TRAINERS</i>		
Large trainers on- and off-the-job	EPS	4
Low training spend trainers*	NESS	3
Large trainers on-the-job only**	EPS	3
Small/micro on-and-off-the job***	EPS	4
High proportion of on-the-job spending****	NESS	4
Off-the-job only	EPS	5
High proportion of off-the-job spending****	NESS	3
<i>NON-TRAINERS</i>		
Non-trainer engaged with skills system	EPS	3
Non-trainers with training plan/budget	EPS	4
Non-trainers with skills gaps	NESS	4
Non-trainers who recruit from education	NESS	3
TOTAL		40

*Train but spend either £0 or in bottom 1% of training spend per establishment

**100 employees or more

***Up to 24 employees, single site only

**** Proportion spent on that type of training represents at least 80% of their total training expenditure

4 Defining Training

Chapter Summary

Employers nearly all agree that training involves the acquisition of knowledge of some kind with a view to making employees better at their jobs, improving their skills, or in some cases advancing their careers.

When discussing the term, a few employers limit their concept of training to activity which is classroom-based and away from the job, or activity which is designed to lead to qualifications (whether delivered in a college setting or on-site). Others are much broader, including communication from management to staff such as memos and instructions as training.

There are some areas that the employer skills survey questions would include as training that some employers do not consider as training when talking about the issues spontaneously, such as first aid courses, being taught how to use new equipment and being allowed to watch others do their job. If these activities had been described specifically in the surveys, a small number of non-trainers would have described themselves as trainers.

The main grey area (or source of confusion) regarding whether an activity is classed as training or not is where 'on-the-job training' meets just 'doing the job.' Some activities whose main aim is to improve the skills of the employee would not strictly be included in typical skills survey measures because they are delivered in a context aligned with the way in which employees undertake their day-to-day job (and hence would not be seen as training by the individual).

In an ideal world, the skills surveys would use a common description understood by all. However, from the evidence presented it is clear that the term "training" means different things to different people, and therefore needs defining in survey questions to ensure consistency of approach and understanding.

In this chapter we examine what employers mean by training and what activities they regard as constituting training. This is important in assessing whether the current explanations and definitions of training used on employer skills surveys capture all the

activities that employers themselves would regard as training. It is also valuable input into how questions about training can be best phrased to be relevant to employers and easy for them to understand and answer. The chapter also looks at how employers measure training, as well as the possibility of any training happening at their establishment without their knowledge.

4.1 Defining training

Whilst the specifics differ, all employers agree that training involves gaining knowledge of some kind, whether this is 'to make them better at their jobs', to 'improve their skills', or in some cases 'to advance their careers'.

"I think of it as being improving the staff in the workplace - brushing up on skills, getting them further along, making them better at their jobs."

"Any type of formal or informal acquisition of knowledge for your job to advance your career and improve you as an employee."

When employers talk about training spontaneously, some are inclined to think about it in terms of quite formal, classroom-based activities away from the job:

"Going off into class situations where you learn something."

"It is giving a presentation to staff or your employees to upgrade their skills."

Similarly, some associate training with it needing to lead to qualifications, whether that be in a college setting or on-site:

"Formal, college or university based learning and training...training can be done in either in the classroom or NVQ assessed on the premises; I still see both of these as training."

"An extension of being at school but more vocational than academic."

Conversely, some employers cast a very wide net as to what they consider to be training, and include activities as training which go beyond what would normally be intended to be

covered by the term within most employer skills surveys:

“Written memos/instruction to drivers – from me to drivers – this is in order for us to comply with the assurance scheme....I count this as training.”

“Any instruction that is given from management to a member of staff regarding ‘this is what is needed to be done’ is a form of training.”

These results demonstrate the importance of specifically mentioning what we want training to cover within the training questions in skills surveys. Whilst ideally there would be a common term that the skills surveys could use which was understood in the same way by all, the results suggest that if employers were left to decide what ‘training’ was to include then some would not consider informal and on-the-job training, while others would include it; others would consider as training activities which would not be counted under our definitions.

It should be noted that the term ‘training’ is the most natural one for employers in relation to the range of activities being discussed. One employer said they prefer the term ‘refreshing’ for what they do (other than their apprentice this company did not undertake activity aimed at developing the skills of staff, and all that was done was refresher courses to keep existing certificates up to date), and one non-trainer used the term ‘natural progression’ to describe the improvements seen as staff get more experience.

‘Development’ was a term regularly used when discussing training – ‘professional development’, ‘learning and development’ and ‘skills development’.

It is also worth noting that ‘coaching’ and ‘mentoring’, which are frequently used in high level management and/or leadership development activities, were mentioned a few times, generally referring to one-to-one advice and support, and these employers tend to feel this light touch activity would not constitute training.

4.2 Which development activities employers treat as ‘training’

To further explore employer understanding of the term ‘training’, respondents were asked whether they undertake, arrange or support any activities as an employer aimed at developing staff but which they would not consider to be training. The following items were mentioned spontaneously in this context:

- Experience gained over time
- Advice and guidance from colleagues on a day-to-day basis
- Team building activities and social events
- Staff meetings
- Secondments
- Newsletters, technical bulletins and industry magazines

However, the exclusion of these activities is not universal. When prompted with a list of activities and asked if they considered them to be training, some differences of opinion emerge. Some employers consider them training, some do not, and for others it depends on the circumstances. The following section briefly goes through each activity to evaluate how closely employers' interpretations match that intended in the typical skills survey questions, starting with activities where the intention is that these activities would be treated as training.

Activities that skills surveys currently *would* include as training:

Providing opportunities for staff to spend time learning through watching others perform their job roles

About three quarters of the employers do this; over half of these say they would count this as training albeit 'informal' training.

"I'd classify it as a form of informal training as someone lower down the management structure is conducting the training."

Of the five employers who say they do absolutely no training (when this was discussed spontaneously), three did make provision for this but do not include it as training.

"We don't mentally think 'oh we are training someone', we just think this is a more complicated job it would be good for them to see what I am doing."

Providing or arranging relevant training whenever new technology or equipment is installed

Around three quarters say they would count this as training, though many note that it is a very infrequent occurrence in their firm, and hence not necessarily something top of mind when they think about training (and it was not mentioned when they were listing the training they undertook).

One non-trainer said they would count this as training if the manufacturer delivered the training. Another felt their activity in this area did not reach the level of training:

“We do that but don’t class it as training. I think it is just a procedure we have to go through as we can’t not do it. It is more about risk assessment.”

First aid courses

Around two thirds of the employers have sent staff on first aid courses in the past, and all say they would class this as training. Three of the five non-trainers have sent someone on a first aid course in the past and likewise would consider this as training.

Activities the skills survey would not include as training:

*Supervision to ensure that employees are guided through their job role over time **

Almost all respondents have staff who are supervised and guided through their job role. When prompted around half said they would class that as training, but with caveats that it was 'very informal'. Words such as 'coaching', 'mentoring' and 'personal development' were commonly used and the general consensus was of a blurred line of where it is training and where it is not.

"I would consider it to be training if it was provided by someone qualified."

"Supervision is watching over, while training is being taught specifically."

Four of the five non-trainers do this activity, but do not really consider it to be training (although one conceded it could be classed as such).

*Allowing staff to perform tasks that go beyond their strict job role and providing them with feedback as to how well they have done **

Just over half of employers say this happens at their site, but most say they would not consider this to be training. Some would regard it as training if some knowledge was gained, with one example being:

"To get a higher level teaching assistant qualification you have to have evidence that you have taken, for example, a class situation."

Two of the five who do not train say they do this but neither would classify it as training.

Colleagues helping out or answering questions about how to do work related tasks

All employers say this happens in their organisation, but the general consensus is that this is not normally training, rather it is just part of the job.

“It never becomes training – it is just too informal to be classed as training because that happens all the time.”

Others however take a different view:

“At any point when one employee imparts knowledge onto another employee who did not have that knowledge it constitutes training.”

A few say that whilst they generally would not count this as training, it has the potential to become so in certain circumstances such as where a question leads to the identification of a general training need – several employers mention this, for example:

“It becomes training when they arrange a time for everyone to meet with a direct itinerary or a specific topic.”

* Note that the UK Employer Skills Survey 2011 asks specifically about these activities separately to the main training questions.

Activities that can be classified as training in skills surveys depending on the circumstances:

Attending conferences / Attending one off seminars

Employers are generally agreed that this is not training if it is simply a networking event, but if knowledge is gained (for example from guest speakers or presentations) it could be classed as such. Some said it depends on the level of the attendee, i.e. it would count as training for management.

“I wouldn't have classified this as training but I can see why it could be if you learn something relevant to your business or job.”

“This could be classified as training if knowledge was gained.”

Providing employees with training manuals or software to assist them with self-directed study

Around a third have done this, but only about a quarter of employers classify this as training. Those talking about user manuals for machinery etc. tend not to call this training, but those for whom it is a means to staff getting qualified do.

Team Days / Away Days

Few of the companies have ever had these, and they are mostly only for management. It is generally considered that whether they are training or not depends on the activity, i.e. getting a guest speaker in or learning about the organisation is training, but more general team building activities are not.

“Depending on what the activity is it can and cannot be training. A day go-karting would be team building and I would not see that as training, a day to a machine show looking and speaking to different types of people could be classed as training.”

Providing time off or financial support for staff to take qualifications unrelated to work

This is quite rare among the employers included in this survey. Around a quarter say they do this, although when probed this is often actually related to work – there were not many who do this for qualifications that are unrelated to work. Most who support non-work related study do not count it as training as it is of no benefit to the organisation, and some say the time off given is unpaid.

These findings suggest that while there is close correlation between the intention of the standard employer skills survey questions as to what is and is not treated as training, and what employers regard as training, there are some ‘grey areas’ particularly in relation to the divide between what is regarded as on-the-job training and what is just part of ‘doing the job’. The skills survey questions normally seek to differentiate on the basis of activities ‘that would be recognised as training by staff’ though this is not always easy for employers to keep in mind when answering questions about training.

Example: A large organisation that trains on- and off-the-job

This organisation has a broad definition of training, including courses in first aid training, improving academic skills such as English and mathematics, and external workshops delivered by other training providers under the bracket of 'training'. They use the word 'training' alongside 'learning and development', and deliver induction training, health and safety training, management training, food quality training and customer service training to their staff.

However, the organisation has reservations in labelling all forms of staff development as 'training'. For example, they consider on-the-job advice, such as in time management, a form of 'coaching' rather than training. They consider coaching to be more 'behavioural' and training to be more 'technical'.

4.3 Recording and measuring the impact of training

An area of interest for us is the extent to which training may occur within an establishment 'under the radar'; that is, without the knowledge of the interviewee in the skills surveys, who is typically the most senior person with responsibility for recruitment, human resources and workplaces skills. This is clearly important in that it helps understand whether current methodology may under-record training. To this end we asked respondents how, if at all, they record training activity, and whether they felt training activity may happen which they are not aware of.

Whilst most of the employers who train staff do keep some sort of log of their training, for the most part this is quite informal. A few had formalised individual training plans for staff, and most record where staff have attended courses or completed statutory training.

"I have a list of what everyone has done and copies of CPC attendance. Nothing is measured formally though."

Formal training, such as that leading to a certificate, is far more likely to be logged than informal training.

“The record I have got is the certificate to say they have undertaken that particular part of the work and gained the qualifications.”

Larger organisations are more likely to have formal procedures in place for logging training:

“We have a computer based system where we log all workshops and that is a corporate system and in-store trackers that we set up and training records.”

However it is quite rare that the *impact* of training is measured. Whilst employers say they expect to see an improvement after training, it is not common to have any formalised system for measuring this objectively. This is particularly true when the training is mandatory, as where training needs to be done regardless of the impact they do not see the value in measuring it.

“There's no way we can measure training in terms of impact; so much of the training is stuff we have to carry out, we couldn't not do it for a month and measure the impact.”

There are a few respondents that had more sophisticated systems for monitoring training that do take impact into account:

“We measure whether the training has been completed within certain time scales and whether the paperwork has been signed off correctly, and we measure it using observations: whether they have put in practice what they have learnt. We monitor it monthly, with pre and post course observations, to see what has changed as an outcome of that training.”

Although in principle the more sophisticated the training measurement system, the less likely it will be that training happens at the establishment without the knowledge of key manager (and hence the respondent to the employer survey), because these tend to be larger employers many of those with sophisticated training measurement systems admit that it is possible that some training happens without their knowledge, though if it does happen this is likely to be quite informal training which they would not seek to record or monitor.

In small and medium sized establishments, respondents nearly all say it is not likely that any activity which might be regarded as training happens without their knowledge, and if it is missed this would be very informal development activity.

5 Classifying training

Chapter Summary

Employers rarely use the 'on-the-job' and 'off-the-job' distinction themselves. When classifying their training into types they are more likely to split it in terms of a) location, b) learning method, c) outcome or d) who delivers the training. For employers, the split between internal and external training is more natural and commonly used than on- and off-the-job, but there is no consensus on what internal and external meant. For some it refers to where the training was delivered (and some treated off-site but on company premises as external, others as internal), and for others it is who delivered it. All the suggested alternative classifications are interpreted slightly differently by different employers. This suggests any classification used needs to be defined to survey respondents and not left open to their own interpretation.

For example when trying to define on- and off-the-job training themselves employers often again emphasise the location of the training or who delivers the training – hence a different interpretation than intended by the standard employer skills survey questions. The difference is a particular issue for on-the-job training, which is a term that many employers do use but often for referring to training delivered at their own site by their own staff.

However, once the full skills survey definitions are read out, the majority of employers are able to say whether they had done any of that particular type of training, and are able to understand what activities fall into each category. This suggests that it would be possible to continue with the current questions, but it is clearly important to ensure that the definitions are read out, in full and to every respondent.

Employer skills surveys in the UK have generally made the distinction between “on-the-job” and “off-the-job” training. This chapter looks at how easily employers find making the distinction and how consistently they allocate different activities to the two types of training. To do this the survey looked at the distinctions employers ‘naturally’ use to classify their training activity, and then examined in depth the current standard employer skill survey definitions, some revised wordings, and then asked respondents specifically about some alternative ways to classify training to see how closely these aligned with employer thinking and behaviour.

5.1 International skills surveys

As a preliminary stage of the research, a review was undertaken of definitions and classifications used in some other countries when asking employers about the training they arrange or fund for their staff.

Skills surveys from Australia³ and New Zealand⁴ have both used questions specifically defining training on the basis of whether it was ‘formal’ or ‘informal’. The Business NZ Skills and Training Survey contained a detailed description that categorised these types of training:

*‘By **skill development and training**, we mean any activities specifically aimed at improving skill levels or understanding... By **formal training**, we mean any training or skill development where learning or skill level is assessed. All other forms of training are described in this questionnaire as **informal training**.’*

The ‘Workforce Readiness Training Survey’⁵ (from the United States) explored more detailed concepts of training, with distinctions made between ‘workforce readiness training’, which is defined as remedial training, ‘job-specific training’ and ‘career development training’.

³ “Australian vocational education and training statistics: Employer Use and Views of the VET System” NCVET 2005

⁴ “Business NZ Skills and Training Survey” Department of Labour 2003

⁵ “Workforce Readiness Training Survey” The Conference Board 2008

In the UK, the Labour Force Survey⁶ (LFS) asks individuals questions relating to the concepts of ‘on-the-job training’ and ‘training away from your job’, followed by further questions on the location where the training takes place. The Workplace Employment Relations Survey⁷ (WERS) combines training into one question and defines it as “*all training for which employees are given a break from their normal work duties, whether the training takes place at their immediate work position or elsewhere*”.

5.2 Employers’ own classifications of training

When asked to think about how they tend to classify training, and about the main different types of training, employers seldom spontaneously use the “on-the-job” and “off-the-job” distinction. They are more likely to split ‘types’ of training in one of the following four ways:

- *Based on who delivers the training:*

This is often in terms of whether the training is delivered by a member of staff (“in-house”) or by external providers. This is a common and important distinction for employers in part because using external providers incurs greater cost.

- *Based on the location of the training:*

Some differentiate training by where it takes place, most commonly “off-site” or “on-site” but some also specified “classroom based” (i.e. away from the usual work position – but not necessarily off-site).

- *Based on the outcome:*

A number of employers classify training based on whether the training leads to a certificate or qualification or not.

- *Based on the learning method:*

This is a common distinction. Types mentioned include practical training, theoretical training, computer-based training, lectures/presentations, self study, e-learning, ‘sitting and listening to someone showing you’, and working alongside a colleague to learn their job.

⁶ “Labour Force Survey” ONS 2010

⁷ “Workplace Employment Relations Survey” DTI/ACAS/ESRC/PSI 2004

Other distinctions made include whether training was statutory or not, whether it was job-specific or general, and whether it was funded or not. Often, however, employers do not really think about training in terms of coherent distinct ‘types’, and think simply of the different subjects and content of the training.

5.3 Understanding of the “on-the-job” / “off-the-job” distinction

The “off-the-job” and “on-the-job” distinction is seldom used spontaneously by employers when talking about different types of training. The term “on-the-job” is used by some, but the term “off-the-job” is not a term that was mentioned by any. When mentioned spontaneously, “on-the-job” is variously used to describe training carried out in the same building/site as that in which the employee usually works, training run by employees of that same company, and training which involves learning through experience while doing the job.

The terms on-the-job and off-the-job training were raised with all respondents (without any further explanation) to see what they consider each to mean, and then the standard skills survey definitions were given, with the following results.

On-the-job training

Employers’ definitions of “on-the-job” training are far less likely to match those used in the employer skills surveys than their definitions of “off-the-job”. Of the 40 respondents, only four gave a description that could categorically be said to match the definition used in these surveys.

The most common difference relates to the location of the training. Whilst the skills surveys typically define on-the-job training as any training that happens “at the individual’s immediate work position”, a large number of employers consider on-the-job to be any training held at the site at which they work. Some of these specify further that it has to be carried out internally i.e. the trainer is also an employee of the company. Hence many treat “on-the-job” as the same as “in-house”.

“Something you do in house with your own staff and resources. You don’t hire anyone in or go out to an external location.”

Other employers consider on-the-job training to cover all learning whilst doing the job, i.e. learning by experience rather than activities that would actually be recognised as training by staff – this is again a point of difference with the standard skills surveys definition of the term which normally asks employers only to include activities which would be considered training by the recipient.

“On-the-job training to me is just natural progression through the trade that you pick up or learn from the people around you.”

There are also a few employers that define “on-the-job training” as any training done during working hours, an interpretation of the term that is clearly quite different from that intended.

Respondents were then prompted with two definitions of on-the-job training, the definition used in the 2011 UK Employer Skills Survey and an alternative wording, as follows:

Original: Activities at the individual’s immediate work position that would be recognised as training by the staff, and not the sort of learning by experience which could take place all the time.

Alternative: Periods of training, instruction or practical experience in the immediate place of work, of which the primary purpose is improving employees’ skills.

Whilst the definitions are understood and clear, some employers make clear that this is not what they had taken the term to mean, particularly if they consider on-the-job training as involving an element of production:

“I don’t see how you can do on-the-job training without doing the job”

“On-the-job is definitely about producing work for the company, and off is not producing as far as I am concerned.”

To these respondents the original definition of on-the-job training given by the skills survey covers more than they would naturally include. However they do seem to understand what the definition is intended to cover and are able to answer accordingly.

There was no consensus as to which of the two definitions were clearer. Some thought both were adequate, and the remainder were split relatively between the two.

Off-the-job training

When asked to explain what they think off-the-job training refers to (before the skills survey definition had been given) around a third of respondents naturally associate it with off-site training, whether that be at a college or provider's premises or at a venue hired for the purpose.

"Where we send them to a training provider's establishment or a college."

"Sending people away for training off-site."

"That would be sending staff off-site to learn something we couldn't deliver in-house."

On this basis many would not treat as off-the-job training activity at the establishment away from the participant's immediate workstation.

A few say that off-the-job training always happened outside of working hours:

"Off-the-job training is organised training outside working hours, e.g. NVQ's where they are at college one day a week."

As with on-the-job questioning, employers in the survey were prompted with two definitions of off-the-job training: the 'standard' definition from various employer skills surveys and an alternative wording:

Original: Training away from the individual's immediate work position, whether on your premises or elsewhere.

Alternative: Specifically arranged formal training sessions, that take the employee away from their day-to-day work.

Again, whilst not everybody 'agrees' with the definitions (that is, they are not what they would take the term to mean), employers say they find the definitions clear and easy to understand. As with on-the-job training, there is no consensus on which definition was easier to understand or closer to their own concept of off-the-job training, though the original definition seems to be better at clarifying that the training does not have to be off-site (which was a common misconception when employers were asked to say spontaneously what they took the term to mean), and also is more inclusive in that if a session is spontaneous and not "specifically arranged" it can still be included.

Ambiguities

As has been discussed, once employers have been given a definition of on- and off-the-job training respondents are generally clear which activities are intended to be classified in each category. Two potential ambiguities were seen as arising.

The first arises when a work position is not fixed. An example of this is a farm where staff work on a variety of tasks around the site. On one reading of the definition of on-the-job training all training at the site would be classified as on-the-job (any part of the farm is the 'immediate work position'), on another interpretation none of the training would be (there is no 'immediate work position').

The second relates to some respondents being unsure how to classify NVQs which involve elements of both on- and off-the-job training. The dilemma comes in part through being unsure whether the same training course / programme is intended to be either one thing or the other, or whether it can fall into both categories.

Example: A large employer who in the survey claimed to arrange/fund only on-the-job training

From previous surveys, this employer reported carrying out on-the-job training only. However, the current study revealed their perceptions of on and off-the-job training to differ from those given in the skills surveys, as they believed that off-the-job training is related to academic certificates, and on-the-job training the general gathering of knowledge and experience while at work.

When presented with the official definition of off-the-job training, the employer considered the induction courses undertaken by staff at the organisation as a form of off-the-job training. This demonstrates the importance of reading out the full definition to all respondents in the interview.

5.4 Alternative classifications of training

A number of alternative classifications (besides on- and off-the-job training) were discussed with respondents to explore whether they were well understood and easy to answer, and whether it would mean more or fewer activities were included as training (and hence potentially an alternative to the current on- and off-the-job distinction).

For each, employers were first asked to say what the terms meant or conveyed to them, and then prompted with definitions to see what they thought of those.

Formal v informal training

Employers find it quite easy to explain these terms in their own way, although their definitions differ between employers. Informal training is commonly described as 'impromptu' or 'ad hoc', and a fair proportion see it as covering coaching, mentoring and learning by experience. Formal training on the other hand has to be 'planned' and 'structured, and is commonly though not necessarily delivered by an external provider. Around a quarter say it has to result in a qualification to be formal training.

“Formal training is structured, delivered by a professional in that area, and is more theoretical. Informal is definitely on-the-job and is more practical.”

“Formal training is specifically given and follows a set procedure - the training that is built into the job role. Informal training is more ad hoc training as and when needs arise.”

Employers were then presented with the following definition for formal and informal training:

Formal: any training or skill development where learning or skill level is assessed;

Informal: any other training or skill development where learning or skill level is not assessed.

The majority find it relatively easy, given this definition, to classify their training into one or the other. Some feel this definition of formal training excludes training which they would regard as formal, for example external courses run by a provider aimed at developing presentation skills but where the skill levels are not assessed as such, certainly not in any formal sense. More generally there is some uncertainty over what constitutes “assessment” in terms of the formal training. Whilst the majority say this would involve the training provider administering some form of test at the end or a formal qualification

being gained from it, others suggest that just by appraising the employee they are assessing their skill level as they would be checking either directly or not that the skills had been put into practice in this way.

There are also cases where staff are assessed for competency by an external verifier where, despite this process leading to certification for the employee, employers are not sure that this constitutes training since the verification is to assess existing skill levels not to increase them.

If this classification were to be used then 'assessed' would need to be more clearly defined to produce reliable, consistent data.

Paid-for v free training

A difficulty some employers had with this classification on a spontaneous basis (without any definition being given) is whether any training can really be free since if staff are taking time away from their normal work to train, then there is a cost in working hours that needs to be covered.

"I think, unless an employee is willing to do an evening class – which I think is pretty unlikely – there's no such thing as completely free training."

When definitions were given that took the cost of the staff time out of the equation ("no direct cost associated with the training beyond the cost of the staff time that was spent on it") there was still some resistance to the use of the word "free" in this context:

"Training cannot ever be free - someone is always going to have to give time up and time is money."

There is also a question over who is paying – one employer said all their training is free because their head office pays. Also, if external funding is being received to cover the cost of the training, there is a question as to whether that makes it free or not.

Internal v external

Of all the distinctions discussed with respondents, 'internal' versus 'external' training was by far the most natural for employers, and many said this is a distinction they use themselves. However, they do not all use it to mean the same thing: some take the term to refer to the identity of the trainer; others take it to refer to the location of the training.

A typical spontaneous definition of the term was as follows:

“Internal training is any training provided by someone who works within the hospital and is given at work or within the organisation (regardless of site). External training is training provided by any person external to the hospital but could be delivered at any or site or even at the hospital.”

A sizeable minority prefer to make the distinction based on whether the training occurred on-site or off-site, i.e. if they bring in an external provider to deliver training in their workplace these employers would class this as internal training.

Employers were then asked to respond to the following definitions:

Internal training: training that is delivered in-house by other employees of the company, rather than by external providers, regardless of where the training takes place,

External training: training using a training provider external to the organisation, regardless of where the training takes place.

Respondents were comfortable with these definitions, and those who originally took internal and external to refer to where the training took place were able to see how the definitions given differed from their own and reclassify their training accordingly.

“It was quite easy to answer – but I disagree with the definition – I define it by location.”

Again NVQs cause some ambiguities, as the employees undertaking these attend college for external training but then may have internal assessors who monitor their progress at work.

One employer mentioned that if a session was a joint session run by him and someone external he would be unsure where to classify it, but said he would choose ‘external’ as by bringing someone else in it shows he could not deliver the training himself.

If the employer skills survey breakdown of training needs to change from the current on- and off-the-job distinction then the internal/external split would be a strong contender from the standpoint of it being easy to understand and to answer.

5.5 Summary

Whilst ideally there would be a standard classification that was understood in the same way by all employers, in the absence of such a standard classification it will be critical to continue to impose one by clearly defining any terms given in the interview.

Although it is not always the definition they were expecting when they heard the terms, most employers are able to say whether they undertake on-the-job or off-the-job training once they have been given the skills survey definitions. The way the questions are currently worded is adequate for understanding, and using alternative definitions will lead to them being interpreted slightly differently which could threaten the ability to make reliable time series comparisons. As one employer puts it:

“In my mind it was clear but I'm beginning to realise you can think of it in different ways. But generally it is quite a clear distinction.”

Ultimately, whilst the on- and off-the-job training is not the most natural distinction for employers to make, they are able to respond to the questions in the way intended once they have heard the definitions of the terms. This emphasises the need to read the definitions *in full* to every respondent in the skills surveys, even if they seem to understand the term before the definition is given.

Other classifications of training that were tested are also generally clear to employers once the definitions are given, but as with on- and off-the-job training, the definitions will not always tally with how respondents understood the terms when they first heard them. A clear example of this is internal and external training, which some initially took to refer to whether the person delivering the training worked for the company or not, whereas others assumed it referred to the location of the training.

6 Underemployment

Chapter summary

The majority of employers in the present survey (and nearly all that do not undertake training) do not believe that they have any individuals within their workforce with skills that are more advanced than needed to do their job proficiently.

Employers find this issue easiest to think about in terms of the further or higher education qualifications individuals have which are not relevant to their job role, and hence think in terms of over-qualified staff. Quite often where staff are over-qualified employers consider that this is because individuals are content with the level they are at or have decided not to aim for a more skilled job because of a lack of ambition or their particular circumstances (e.g. the working patterns of the job suit them).

Whilst a small number of employers with over-qualified staff believe them to lack motivation, the majority think that underemployment can contribute positively to the organisation, for example because of the higher intelligence of the workforce and the potential for skill sharing or utilising their skills elsewhere in the organisation.

This chapter examines employers' understanding and views on underemployment. Questions were asked about the extent of and the reasons for underemployment, with a particular area of interest for underemployment being the potential effects for the employee and the benefits for the organisation. The issue of underemployment is of particular interest as there has been little focus on the issue in previous employer skills surveys, hence little is known about its prevalence and impact from an employer perspective. The findings from the present research will inform the development of questionnaires for future employer skills surveys.

Broadly speaking, underemployment relates to the situation where labour is not being fully utilised, and one case of this is where employees have more skills and or qualifications than are necessary for the job role they are doing. This area is of interest as it is evidence of inefficiencies in the skills market – either money has been spent training and qualifying workers in skills they are not using or do not need, or employers are not taking full advantage of the skills and abilities of their workforce. It is a key policy issue in regard to assessing what skills and qualifications employers want and then use.

Issues of interest with regard to underemployment are its effects for employers – do they benefit from this ‘excess’ of skills, or does it have detrimental consequences? Of the unrepresentative sample of employers interviewed for this, a minority say they have an over-skilled workforce (i.e. some of their workforce possess skills more advanced than are needed to do their job proficiently). Trainers were far more likely than non-trainers to have over-skilled staff. To reiterate, the sample for this study was not representative, and results should not be inferred to the overall population of UK employers or to sub-groups or industries.

Nearly all instances of having over-skilled staff related to staff being over-qualified, and referred to qualifications obtained by employees prior to joining the company. The qualifications tended to be further or higher education qualifications.

Some employers attribute the existence of over-qualified staff in their firm to the economic climate, arguing that many in today’s labour market cannot find employment to match their skills and have had to accept jobs they are over-skilled for.

“There are always a few who are over qualified, especially in the current market place where people are seeking jobs with degrees and very good qualifications”

In addition to this, a reason given for underemployment is the fact that some employees are content in the position they hold and do not wish to use the additional skills they possess, as the following example shows:

“The graduate lacks the motivation to progress, however he is competent for the job so everyone is happy.”

Respondents generally feel they benefit from having over-qualified staff, and in most cases the employees themselves have chosen to work at such a level in order to satisfy other commitments. One such example is a respondent’s explanation of over-skilled teaching assistants in a primary school:

“I have got quite a lot of TAs who have a degree which you wouldn’t need to be a TA. It tends to be mums who have come into the TA profession because it fits around their children (they may have had high flying jobs in London but settle locally and work as a TA to get school holiday breaks and the 3.30 finish appeals).”

A small number of respondents do mention the potential for over-skilled employees to become 'stagnant' in their positions and lose motivation. However, respondents are largely positive regarding the potential impacts that underemployment can bring the organisation as a whole. Some respondents believe that the extra qualifications that over-skilled employees may have can provide an indication of intelligence and common sense. Again, this is seen as positive by the respondent working in the primary school:

"There is a tremendous benefit to the school as we get clearly articulate people. I don't mind what education TAs have had beforehand but to get more highly educated people in, particularly in schools, is what you want. It has an impact on morale. It makes people want to do a bit more, there is healthy competition."

In addition, respondents cite skill sharing as a positive impact, as well as the flexibility that an over-skilled workforce can bring. For instance, one respondent explained that over-skilled staff are able to cover other staff who are absent. Another is able to use their skills to add value:

"I have two people with art degrees and they are used a lot for art clubs and after school clubs."

One respondent mentioned that some of their temporary staff are often more qualified for the job as they are using it as a stop-gap during or after finishing their education. This employer tries to tap into these extra skills and views them as potential future employees for higher level jobs such as management:

"We try to tap in and do something for them to open up opportunities for them...we have had some real success with people who have come into retail as a stop gap and then realised their potential."

The results of this survey suggest that underemployment does not appear to be a significant problem from the perspective of employers, and most employers that experience it feel they benefit.

Case Study

A large organisation that trains on and off-the-job, and has skills gaps and underemployment within the organisation

This organisation works in insurance and employs over 250 staff, with the majority of employees working as 'agents' on the shop floor taking calls from existing and prospective customers.

The employer considers some long-term staff to be over-skilled for their position. They have acquired such skills at the organisation, but have made a conscious decision not to aim for a higher level within the company.

"We have another building which has our technical and claims area. People have been there for 15-20 years plus who are very experienced and trained but are operating at a level dealing with the complaints, but they don't want to progress even though they could."

The respondent believes that underemployment benefits the organisation. She believes that it is advantageous in the event of a restructuring of the company, as they would be able to 'dip into their knowledge and experience'. In addition, experienced employees that are over-skilled can help other members of staff.

"There are benefits - people go to them as a guru and it gives the company stability because they have been with us for so long."

7 Apprenticeships

Chapter Summary

Whilst recognition of the term 'apprenticeship' is widespread, only around half the respondents were aware of the government's involvement in them (usually around the funding of apprenticeships), and fewer still could name any specific Apprenticeship programmes.

If future employer surveys seek to measure employer awareness of government-funded or government-recognised Apprenticeships, then results will be very different if the question is asked at a very general level or whether it tests awareness of particular named programmes. Employers can be aware of government-recognised Apprenticeships while having extremely limited understanding of what an Apprenticeship involves.

A section on apprenticeships was included in the study to better understand how employers interpret the questions asked of them in employer skills surveys. The skills surveys focus very specifically on Apprenticeships that are recognised by the government, rather than training schemes set up by employers themselves, and this study sought to clarify whether employers understand this distinction.

7.1 Understanding of "apprenticeships"

All employers were able to give a response when asked what they thought an apprenticeship was: all regarded it as to do with training people new to an industry; most talked about this being for young people (typically under 19) but some acknowledged that older people can take apprenticeships too.

However the amount they knew about apprenticeships varied widely. For a few, the information described above was the limit of their knowledge, and they knew nothing about how they were funded or run. Many still held old fashioned views about who apprenticeships were for and what industries they were available to:

"I tend to think of school leavers; but it could be any age. They will tend to have little knowledge of the industry; my perception is an apprentice tends to

work with their hands.”

“I don’t know because I have never had anything to do with apprenticeships, have never worked in a big office.”

Some did not realise it was a formal qualification, instead thinking of it as generally training for new starters:

“A young person being taught by an older experienced person.”

“It is usually getting someone in who wants to learn the job and teaching them up.”

“Apprenticeship would be training my young Saturday girls, 15 – 16 year old girls.”

Others however had much more detailed knowledge, with two common themes being the combination of work and college-based learning and that apprenticeships have changed in recent years.

“They used to be quite young - school/college leavers – now, because of the economic situation, I think it can be all people and all ages.”

“I term an apprentice a formal on-the-job/off-the-job type training scenario where a new employee is built from foundation through to being a capable and able member of the workforce.”

Some had negative perceptions as to what apprenticeships involved for the apprentice or for the employer:

“Apprenticeships mean staff get paid low wages and get taken advantage of.”

“Young people can use the apprenticeship to gain skills at the expense of the employer and leave the company after training at a cost to the employer”

Overall however responses indicate that in the main employers do understand that the term ‘apprenticeship’ relates to a formal programme rather than informal training for new entrants.

7.2 Government involvement

When asked about funding around half were aware of government funding for Apprenticeships, and slightly more were aware of government involvement with Apprenticeships.

Only three employers in the study were able to name any specific schemes / programmes – two mentioned Modern Apprenticeships (though admitted being unsure if they still existed) and one mentioned the National Apprenticeship Service.

“No I'm not aware of any specific schemes, just the term 'Modern Apprenticeships'.”

However, a number of employers commented that they would still say they were aware of 'Apprenticeships recognised by the government' even though they could not name the specific programmes:.

“Yes I'm aware of them, I just couldn't name them!”

“I realise there are hundreds of schemes. The government is wanting everyone to have a qualification whether that person wants a qualification or not.”

“I presume the government must do something but I am not aware of what is going on.”

This has implications for how the question is asked in the Employer Perspectives Survey 2012, as it indicates that the way the question is asked could significantly impact on the results obtained. If asked in a general manner ('are you aware of Apprenticeships recognised by the government?') the implication is that more would say yes than if specific schemes only were asked about. The consideration here is which figure is most useful for the survey sponsors.

8 Conclusions and Recommendations

There is no common, standard way in which employers classify training or indeed in the activities they include under this term, and even words and phrases in common use are interpreted differently by different employers. This presents a challenge for the skills surveys: to obtain consistent and meaningful responses respondents need to be guided as to the nature of activities we wish them to include as training, and any such definitions need to be reasonably well developed / clearly defined since, as the data here shows, even simple binary oppositions which are in common use are interpreted very differently (for example internal/external training sometimes being interpreted on the basis of who provides the training, and sometimes on the location where the training takes place).

The current use of the terms “on-the-job” and “off-the-job” have well developed definitions in place already, and whilst they are not commonly used terms nor always understood in the way intended before they have been defined in detail, the evidence suggests that once the full definition is read out these terms are generally understood (and answered) as intended.

The interview tested a different wording to explain and describe on- and off-the-job training to see if this was preferred by employers, or better differentiated for them the activities we wish to classify into each training type. Findings were mixed on this: most employers had no preference and thought both descriptions were clear, and where one was preferred over the other a) the split was even between preferring the original and the revised wording, and b) it was in terms of only slightly preferring one over the other. Nor did the different wordings have a significant impact on which activities were classified as on-the-job or off-the-job training.

Whilst there could be an argument for tightening up the wording around the definitions of on- and off-the-job, any change would affect the time series comparisons on the skills surveys as it would be measuring something slightly different to previous years. While this does not preclude changes in future, it is a significant caution. Any changes should be checked carefully with stakeholders and policy makers to make sure that their requirements would continue to be met.

With this in mind, the recommendation is to maintain the “on-the-job” and “off-the-job” definitions as they are currently for the 2011. With over 80,000 interviews being carried out across three fieldwork contractors, it would however be of benefit to rework the

wording slightly to increase consistency across the different interviewers. Currently the explanation of the term is a second sentence (“Over the past 12 months have you funded or arranged any off-the-job training or development for employees at this site? By off-the-job training we mean training away from the individual’s immediate work position, whether on your premises or elsewhere?”) and it is possible that some respondents answer before the second part is read out. This could be improved simply by reducing the break in the question (“Over the past 12 months have you funded or arranged any off-the-job training or development for employees at this site - by off-the-job we mean...”) or by reworking slightly “We’d like to discuss the types of training, if any, that staff at this establishment have undertaken in the last 12 months. The first type is off-the-job training, by which we mean training away from the individual’s immediate work position, whether on your premises or elsewhere. Have you funded or arranged any off-the-job training in the last 12 months?”

The current question approach asks respondents to consider their training and development activity over the last 12 months within the confines of a classification of training (on- and off-the job) that few use themselves. A more radical alternative would be to analyse on- and on-the-job training using a ‘bottom-up’ approach whereby respondents are asked whether they have arranged or funded (or staff have undertaken) a list of pre-defined activities (e.g. off-site courses taught by people outside your organisation, off-site courses taught by people from your own organisation etc) and then at the analysis stage the extent of on- and off-the-job training is determined by the specific responses given. The terms on- and off-the-job training would not need to be used. The disadvantages of this approach are:

- that the time-series comparison would be lost (our assumption is that because of the prompting of specific activities, training events that may otherwise have been forgotten about or mis-classified would now be included),
- it almost by definition would add to the questionnaire length, a key consideration in achieving our required response rates, as well as – more importantly – in minimising the burden we place on the employers who give their valuable time to answer.

The advantages would be that it gives a more accurate and consistent picture of training activity (by avoiding respondents having to self-classify their activities into either on- or off-the-job training) and it provides more detailed information than is collected previously. This would allow more flexibility for analysis since different classifications of training could be developed at the analysis stage by grouping their activities in different ways (beyond just on- and off-the-job training).

If alternative definitions or alternative classifications were to be pursued from 2012 onwards, we would recommend a full testing programme with a representative population to ascertain how data would be affected and to develop watertight definitions that will be easily understandable to employers. The split between internal and external training was one which was particularly pertinent to employers and could be explored further, for example.

The other major consideration is what policy makers require – whilst the on- and off-the-job were considered the most useful when the survey series was conceived ten years ago, it may be that the direction of policy produces different requirements from the survey in years to come.

Appendix A: Topic Guide

Private & Confidential	J4925	Date
12/7/11		
Defining and measuring training activity	Face to face	

Key Number												
Name												
Company name												
Location												
Date/Time of interview												
Quota Group	TRAINERS							NON-TRAINERS				
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
	<i>Circle and write in:</i>											

Introduction

Thank you for agreeing to take part in this research.

EXPLAIN TO RESPONDENT:

- **Introduce self, company and project**

We are conducting research on behalf of the UK Commission for Employment and Skills to explore training activity in a variety of organisations.

From the research we hope to get a full picture of the sort of training employers undertake, and the activities that would and would not be counted as “training”.

- **Discuss their role in the process**
 - **part of a number of interviews with employers**
 - **speaking to employers with a variety of training needs including no training at all to get a full picture**
- **All answers confidential. UKCES will not know they have been interviewed and will only see responses in an anonymised form**
- **No right or wrong answers/looking for personal understanding and opinions.**

- **1 hour. Need to record full interview.**

A Defining Training

A1 **So to start off: What do you think of when you hear the term “training”?**

- What sort of activities come to mind?
- IF TRAIN: Would you even use the word “training” within your establishment or do you have some other term for these activities?
- IF TRAIN: Can you list all of the types of training and workforce development activities undertaken at this establishment in the last 12 months? What else?
- ALL: What different ‘types’ of training can you think of? (NO PROMPTING)

A1A **Are there any other activities which you undertake, arrange or support as an employer which develop the skills or experience of your workforce, but which you wouldn’t classify as “training”?**

- IF YES: What activities are these?
- IF YES: Why is this not classed as “training”?

INTERVIEWER NOTE: RESPONSES FROM SCREENER/PREVIOUS SURVEY WERE:

ON THE JOB: Y / N OFF THE JOB Y / N (CIRCLE AS APPROPRIATE)

A2 **Different organisations ‘classify’ training in different ways. In this next bit I’d like to look at what each distinction means to you, if anything, and whether the definitions used are appropriate to your organisation (whether you train staff or not).**

So firstly I’d like to ask you about “on-the-job” and “off-the-job” training. What do these terms mean to you?

- Is it a distinction you would naturally use?

- IF TRAIN: Of the training and development activities you have already mentioned you do at this establishment, which would you classify as “on-the-job” and which “off-the-job”? Do any activities not fit into either?

- ALL: Are there any activities not already mentioned that you do at this establishment that might fall into the definitions of on-the-job and off-the-job training? What activities? What others?

(A2A) **If we defined “off-the-job training” as training away from the individual’s immediate work position, whether on your premises or elsewhere, then would you say you have arranged or funded any off the job training for your staff in the last 12 months?**

Yes	No	Don’t know
-----	----	------------

- If response different to last time, find out why.

If I asked the same question with the following alternative definition, would that change your answer? SHOWCARD A

“Over the past 12 months have you arranged or funded any off-the-job training or development for employees at this site? By off-the-job training we mean specifically arranged formal training sessions, that take the employee away from their day to day work.”

Probe for:

- Does this definition fit the way you would think about training activity more or less closely than the previous one?

- Which is clearer?

- Does it change what activities you would consider to be “off-the-job training”? Which do or could fall into the first and not the second (and vice versa)?

Now thinking about “on-the-job training”...

(A2B) **If we defined “on-the-job training” as activities that would be recognised as training by the staff, and not the sort of learning by experience which could take place all the time, then would you say you have arranged or funded any on the job training for your staff in the last 12 months?**

Yes	No	Don't know
-----	----	------------

- If response different to last time, find out why.

Again, if I asked the same question with the following alternative definition, would that change your answer? **SHOWCARD B**

“Over the past 12 months have you arranged or funded any on-the-job training or development for employees at this site? By on-the-job training we mean periods of training, instruction or practical experience in the immediate place of work, of which the primary purpose is improving employees’ skills.”

Probe for:

- Does this definition fit the way you would think about training activity more or less closely than the previous one?
- Which is clearer
- Does it change what activities you would consider to be “on-the-job training”? Which do or could fall into the first and not the second (and vice versa)?

A2C **IF TRAIN: How easy was it to answer the questions about on- and off-the-job training – i.e. how easy was it to split your training into the two types? Why?**

- **PROBE FOR AMBIGUITIES** e.g. are there any activities you were not sure whether to class as on- or off-the-job training? Any that fall under both? Any that fall under neither?

A3 On- and off-the job training is just one way of classifying training. I'd now like to go through a few different ways organisations might be classifying their training with you, and see what you think of them and whether it is possible to categorise your training in that way.

A3A So firstly, I'd like to look at the difference between formal and informal training. What do these terms mean to you?

- Is it a distinction you would naturally use?
- IF TRAIN: Of the training and development activities you have already mentioned you do at this establishment, which would you classify as "formal" and which "informal"? Do any activities not fit into either?
- ALL: Are there any activities not already mentioned that you do at this establishment that might fall into the definition of informal training? What activities? What others?

A3B If we defined formal training as any training or skill development where learning or skill level is assessed, would you say you have arranged or funded any formal training for your staff in the last 12 months?

Yes	No	Don't know
-----	----	------------

- How much does that differ from your own definition?
- How easy is it to say "yes or no"? Are there any activities you are unsure of?
- What do you think is meant by "assessed" – who assesses? How?
- How important is it for training to include some form of assessment to be considered "formal"?

And if we defined informal training as any other training or skill development where learning or skill level is not assessed, would you say you have arranged or funded any informal training for your staff in the last 12 months?

Yes	No	Don't know
-----	----	------------

- How much does that differ from your own definition of informal training?
- How easy is it to say "yes or no"? Are there any activities you are unsure of?

A3C IF TRAIN: How easy was it to answer the questions on formal and informal training – i.e. how easy was it to split their training into the two types? Why?

- PROBE FOR AMBIGUITIES e.g. are there any activities you were not sure whether to class formal or informal training? Any that fall under both? Any that fall under neither?

A4A Next I'd like to look at the difference between "paid for" and "free" training. What do

these terms mean to you?

- What costs might be associated with training? What might you “pay for”
- What training is “free”?
- Is it a distinction you would naturally use?
- IF TRAIN: Of the training and development activities you have already mentioned you do at this establishment, which would you classify as “paid for” and which “free”? Do any activities not fit into either?
- ALL: Are there any activities not already mentioned that you do at this establishment that might fall into the definitions of “paid for” and “free” training? What activities? What others?

A4B **If we defined “paid for” training as any training that had a direct cost associated with it beyond the cost of the staff time that was spent on it, would you say you have arranged or funded any paid for training for your staff in the last 12 months?**

Yes	No	Don't know
-----	----	------------

- How much does that differ from your own definition?
- How easy is it to say “yes or no”? Are there any activities you are unsure of?

And if we defined free training as training where there was no direct cost associated with the training beyond the cost of the staff time that was spent on it, would you say you have arranged any free training for your staff in the last 12 months?

Yes	No	Don't know
-----	----	------------

- How much does that differ from your own definition of free training?
- How easy is it to say “yes or no”? Are there any activities you are unsure of?
- Can training ever be “free”?

A4C **IF TRAIN: How easy was it to answer the questions on paid for and free training – i.e. how easy was it to split their training into the two types? Why?**

- PROBE FOR AMBIGUITIES e.g. are there any activities you were not sure whether to class paid for or free training? Any that fall under both? Any that fall under neither?

A5A Next I'd like to look at the difference between "internal" and "external" training. What do these terms mean to you?

- Is it a distinction you would naturally use?
- IF TRAIN: Of the training and development activities you have already mentioned you do at this establishment, which would you classify as "internal" and which "external"? Do any activities not fit into either?
- ALL: Are there any activities not already mentioned that you do at this establishment that might fall into the definitions of "internal" and "external" training? What activities? What others?

A5B If we defined "internal training" as training that is delivered in-house by other employees of the company, rather than by external providers, regardless of where the training takes place, would you say you have arranged or funded any internal training for your staff in the last 12 months?

Yes	No	Don't know
-----	----	------------

- How much does that differ from your own definition?
- How easy is it to say "yes or no"? Are there any activities you are unsure of?

And if we defined "external training" as training using a training provider external to the organisation, regardless of where the training takes place, would you say you have arranged or funded any external training for your staff in the last 12 months?

Yes	No	Don't know
-----	----	------------

- How much does that differ from your own definition of external training?
- How easy is it to say "yes or no"? Are there any activities you are unsure of?

A5C IF TRAIN: How easy was it to answer the questions on internal and external training – i.e. how easy was it to split their training into the two types? Why?

- PROBE FOR AMBIGUITIES e.g. are there any activities you were not sure whether to class internal or external training? Any that fall under both? Any that fall under neither?

B Specific Training and Wider Workforce Development

ASK ALL

B1 **Moving on to other activities staff at your establishment might be undertaking aimed at developing their skills or experience, for each of the following could you please tell me**

a) whether you do that activity, and

b) whether you would class it as “training” as such (including if there are any particular circumstances required for it to be classed as training).

- Supervision to ensure that employees are guided through their job role over time
- Providing opportunities for staff to spend time learning through watching others perform their job roles
- Allowing staff to perform tasks that go beyond their strict job role and providing them with feedback as to how well they have done
- Attending conferences
- Attending one off seminars
- Any form of induction when an employee first joins the company
 - What would this involve?
 - Would you use the term “induction” to describe this activity? IF NOT: What term would you use instead?
- Providing employees with training manuals or software to assist them with self-directed study
- Providing or arranging relevant training whenever new technology or equipment is installed
 - Does it make a difference if the manufacturer gave the training, e.g. if a new photocopier installed?
- Colleagues helping out or answering questions about how to do work related tasks
- At what point does this become “training”?
- Team Days / Away Days
- First Aid courses
- Providing time off or financial support for staff to take qualifications unrelated to work

ASK B2 TO ALL WHO TRAIN:

B2 How do you record the training activity that happens in your establishment?

- Do you measure it formally? How?
- What do you measure? Amount overall / per employee? Cost? Staff time taken?
- Do you ever measure it in terms of the impact it has? How do you assess this?

ASK EVERYBODY:

B3 How likely is it that some training or workforce development happens “under the radar”, which you are unable to see or measure?

- What sort of activities would that involve?
- Is there any way it could be measured? Is it measured at departmental level?

B4 Do you have any way of assessing the skills of your employees?

- Do they measure them formally?
- Is there any benefit to the employee of improving their skills? Promotion, pay rises, changes in the work they do?

C Training context

C1 **Now thinking about your workforce at your establishment – do you have any staff who are not fully proficient at their jobs?**

- If so what proportion of staff, and what has caused this?
- What are they doing about it?
- Do they anticipate any future skills gaps for any reason? Why?

C2 **Evidence suggests that some employers in some industries have a workforce with a range and level of skills that is actually more than they need to do their job proficiently. Does this apply to any employees at this establishment?**

- IF YES: Among which staff? (Job role, level, age, time at company etc)
- What sort of skills do they have that aren't needed?
- When did the employees acquire these skills? Where?

REASONS:

- Why do you think this happens?
- Why are the skills not being used? Did they need them in a previous role at the company?
- Would there be circumstances in which these skills could be used? If not, why?
- What might need to change to use these skills effectively?

IMPACT:

- Do you feel it affects the employees adversely to not be using all their skills?
- Is there any benefit to the establishment of having people with these skills, even if they are seldom used?

D Apprenticeships

D1 In the previous survey, we asked some questions about apprenticeships and in this final part of the interview I just wanted to go over some of the issues we were talking about and see what you think.

What do you understand by the term “apprenticeship”?

- Who are apprentices (age, experience, industry etc)
- How might an organisation go about setting up and/or running an apprenticeship scheme?
- How long do they last?
- Where does funding come from?

D2 We ask in the survey whether you are aware of “Apprenticeship schemes recognised by the government”. What did you take that to mean?

- Are you aware of any specific schemes?
- Would you say yes even if they could not name schemes, because you were aware of the government’s involvement in apprenticeship schemes
- Would you include schemes set up by an organisation themselves?

Thank you for your time today helping with this important research, your answers have been very useful.

THANK RESPONDENT AND CLOSE INTERVIEW

I declare that this survey has been carried out under IFF instructions and within the rules of the MRS Code of Conduct.		
Interviewer signature:	Date:	
Finish time:	Interview Length	Mins

Appendix B: National skills survey training questions

The questions on training activity differ slightly in each of the nations' past skills surveys. For 2011 all four nations are conducting their skills survey together and as such are using the same question wordings as detailed in section 2.2 of this report.

Previous question wordings were as follows:

- o England (National Employer Skills Survey 2009 (NESS 2009)):

Off-the-job training:

“Over the past 12 months have you funded or arranged any off-the-job training or development for employees at this site? By off-the-job training we mean training away from the individual's immediate work position, whether on your premises or elsewhere?”

On-the-job training:

“And have you funded or arranged any on-the-job or informal training and development over the last 12 months? By this I mean activities that would be recognised as training by the staff, and not the sort of learning by experience which could take place all the time.”

- o Northern Ireland (Northern Ireland Skills Monitoring Survey 2008 (NISMS 2008)):

Off-the-job training:

“Over the past 12 months have you funded or arranged any off-the-job training or development for employees at this site. By off-the-job training we mean training away from the individual's immediate work position, whether on your premises or elsewhere? It includes all sorts of courses – full or part time; correspondence or distance learning; Health and Safety training and so on.”

On-the-job training:

“Turning briefly now to on-the-job and informal training and development. By on-the-job training I mean training that is given at the desk of place where the person usually works, but would be recognised as training by the staff, and not the sort of learning by experience which could take place all the time.

Have you funded or arranged any such on-the-job or informal training over the last 12 months?”

- Scotland (Scottish Employer Skills Survey 2010 (SESS 2010)):

“And has the training that this organisation has arranged for employees at this site in the last 12 months been on-the-job training, off-the-job training, or both?”

By on-the-job training, I mean all training that is carried out at the immediate workstation (i.e. the individual's desk or normal working location within your establishment).

For the purposes of this study, by off-the-job training, I mean training that is conducted away from the immediate workstation whether it is conducted at your premises or elsewhere. Off-the-job training can include all sorts of courses – full or part-time; correspondence or distance learning; health & safety training, and so on – as long as it is funded or arranged by you.”

- Wales (Future Skills Wales 2005)

Off-the-job training:

“I am now going to ask you some questions about off-the-job training. By off-the-job training, I mean all training that was delivered away from the immediate work position. It can be given at your premises or elsewhere. It includes all sorts of courses – full or part-time; correspondence, distance or e-learning; health and safety training and so on – as long as it is funded or arranged by your organisation for employees working at this site.

Has your organisation funded or arranged any off-the-job training for any of your employees over the past 12 months at this site?"

On-the-job training:

Not asked.

List of previous publications

Executive summaries and full versions of all these reports are available from www.ukces.org.uk

Evidence Report 1

Skills for the Workplace: Employer Perspectives

Evidence Report 2

Working Futures 2007-2017

Evidence Report 3

Employer Demand for Skills: A Review of Evidence & Policy

Evidence Report 4

High Performance Working: A Synthesis of Key Literature

Evidence Report 5

High Performance Working: Developing a Survey Tool

Evidence Report 6

Review of Employer Collective Measures: A Conceptual Review from a Public Policy Perspective

Evidence Report 7

Review of Employer Collective Measures: Empirical Review

Evidence Report 8

Review of Employer Collective Measures: Policy Review

Evidence Report 9

Review of Employer Collective Measures: Policy Prioritisation

Evidence Report 10

Review of Employer Collective Measures: Final Report

Evidence Report 11

The Economic Value of Intermediate Vocational Education and Qualifications

Evidence Report 12

UK Employment and Skills Almanac 2009

Evidence Report 13

National Employer Skills Survey 2009: Key Findings

Evidence Report 14

Strategic Skills Needs in the Biomedical Sector: A Report for the National Strategic Skills Audit for England, 2010

Evidence Report 15

Strategic Skills Needs in the Financial Services Sector: A Report for the National Strategic Skills Audit for England, 2010

Evidence Report 16

Strategic Skills Needs in the Low carbon Energy generation Sector: A Report for the National Strategic Skills Audit for England, 2010

Evidence Report 17

Horizon Scanning and Scenario Building: Scenarios for Skills 2020

Evidence Report 18

High Performance Working: A Policy Review

Evidence Report 19

High Performance Working: Employer Case Studies

Evidence Report 20

A Theoretical Review of Skill Shortages and Skill Needs

Evidence Report 21

High Performance Working: Case Studies Analytical Report

Evidence Report 22

The Value of Skills: An Evidence Review

Evidence Report 23

National Employer Skills Survey for England 2009: Main Report

Evidence Report 24

Perspectives and Performance of Investors in People: A Literature Review

Evidence Report 25

UK Employer Perspectives Survey 2010

Evidence Report 26

UK Employment and Skills Almanac 2010

Evidence Report 27

Exploring Employer Behaviour in relation to Investors in People

Evidence Report 28

Investors in People - Research on the New Choices Approach

Evidence Report 29

Defining and Measuring Training Activity

Evidence Report 30

Product strategies, skills shortages and skill updating needs in England: New evidence from the National Employer Skills Survey, 2009



Evidence Reports present detailed findings of the research produced by the UK Commission for Employment and Skills. The reports contribute to the accumulation of knowledge and intelligence on skills and employment issues through the review of existing evidence or through primary research. All of the outputs of the UK Commission can be accessed on our website at www.ukces.org.uk

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