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SECTOR SKILLS AGREEMENTS IMPLEMENTATION PROGRESS REPORT

RESEARCH REPORT 24
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Sector Skills Development Agency: Research Series Foreword

In October 2002 the Department for Education and Skills (DfES) formally launched Skills for Business (SfB), a new UK-wide network of employer-led Sector Skills Councils (SSCs), supported and directed by the Sector Skills Development Agency (SSDA). The purpose of SfB is to bring employers more centre stage in articulating their skill needs and delivering skills-based productivity improvements that can enhance UK competitiveness and the effectiveness of public services. The remit of the SSDA includes establishing and progressing the network of SSCs, supporting the SSCs in the development of their own capacity and providing a range of core services. Additionally the SSDA has responsibility for representing sectors not covered by an SSC and co-ordinating action on generic issues.

Research, and developing a sound evidence base, is central to the SSDA and to Skills for Business as a whole. It is crucial in: analysing productivity and skill needs; identifying priorities for action; and improving the evolving policy and skills agenda. It is vital that the SSDA research team works closely with partners already involved in skills and related research to generally drive up the quality of sectoral labour market analysis in the UK and to develop a more shared understanding of UK-wide sector priorities.

The SSDA is undertaking a variety of activities to develop the analytical capacity of the network and enhance its evidence base. This involves: developing a substantial programme of new research and evaluation, including international research; synthesizing existing research; developing a common skills and labour market intelligence framework; taking part in partnership research projects across the UK; and setting up an expert panel drawing on the knowledge of leading academics, consultants and researchers in the field of labour market studies. Members of this panel will feed into specific research projects and peer review the outputs; be invited to participate in seminars and consultation events on specific research and policy issues; and will be asked to contribute to an annual research conference.

The SSDA takes the dissemination of research findings seriously. As such it has developed this dedicated research series to publish all research sponsored by the SSDA.

Lesley Giles
Acting Director of Strategy and Research at the SSDA

Executive Summary

Introduction

This research was commissioned and funded by the Sector Skills Development Agency (SSDA) on behalf of the Skills for Business (SfB) network. The purpose was to build on previous evaluation work and to report on early progress and important developments of the implementation phase of Sector Skills Agreements (SSAs). The fieldwork for this study was completed in the autumn of 2006, building on the wide ranging consultation process for the Phase 3 evaluation of the SfB network earlier the same year.

Findings

- Developing SSAs

SSAs are being developed in a series of tranches (the first tranche, covered by this study, are referred to as Pathfinders) and the range of dates for completion has been described as having implications for partners, including the workload involved and the fit of the outcomes with planning cycles. Non-SSC respondents to the study had been involved with the SSA process in two main ways: attending consultation meetings or events and acting as members of committees or groups developing and reviewing SSAs. Most respondents were positive about the SSA process, which had helped to formalise linkages between SSCs and stakeholders and bring together employers needs and views.

Concerns reflected by employers about SSAs were that they perceived the SSC and public agencies to be acting together, but with employers not included; and that they perceived there to be a focus on public sector solutions being agreed within existing parameters, rather than prompting a breakthrough change.

Stakeholders had relatively high level expectations of the outcomes of the SSA process, including that it would: provide a strategic view of future sector needs; ensure learning provision better met employer needs; raise skill levels within the sector; influence the content of qualifications and that the SSA would include a detailed and costed action plan, arrived at through consultation. Stakeholders had in particular anticipated a definitive view of the future labour market requirements in each sector, and where stakeholders operated in regional or local contexts they expected that the data gathered would be disaggregated to this level. There was also an implicit assumption that SSAs would be relatively similar even though the recommended actions arising could differ markedly. What was less certain was how expectations of the SSA process and outcomes were to be realised. Indeed, several stakeholders acknowledged that they were not sure how the process would work out, but that this was to be expected given that the process was new for all concerned.

SSCs also had high aspirations. Two main areas of issue were raised as the process developed. Firstly, there was uncertainty about the level of detail that should be included in the SSA. All recognised that the country dimension would be a factor, but this appears to have been under-played in some instances, for example there was uncertainty as to how far regional plans needed to be developed. Second, some SSCs chose to focus on part of their footprint in developing their SSA, which caused some confusion and resistance with stakeholders who had expected the whole footprint to be covered.

A further issue was the extent to which the supply side would respond to the SSA. It appears that SSCs believed that the supply side would respond quickly and fully to

evidence presented and were confident that they would exert considerable influence, which would produce short term changes. Supply side stakeholders were less sure how they would react - they were unsure what would be produced from the SSA; in some cases they were comfortable with existing patterns of provision; they often felt committed to funding and activity cycles for some time ahead; and they felt driven by government targets that were already set.

- Implementation

SSAs were described as having two key features – a key mechanism for employers to identify their skills needs and gaps; and a series of deals between employers, funders, providers and the government to deliver those needs. The completion of the SSA was described as the beginning, not the end of the process, with implementation and maintenance the long-term task. There was some concern that this transition took longer to become apparent than was expected. However, the general sense was that the majority of the actions were proceeding to plan, and there was some confidence around the direction and speed of travel.

The style of the Pathfinder SSA documents varies considerably. At the simplest level of analysis they are very different in length and the level of detail contained. More significant are the differences in the number and nature of proposed solutions, ranging from 8 to 50 actions, with varying levels of detail. The difference in presentation did not easily support understanding key distinctions in requirements or actions. A common theme reflected by respondents could be described as SSCs having to understand the needs and constraints of the partner organisations, including the need to understand the operational remit, business cycles and timescales of each organisation, and that nations may have different policy priorities – this issue was of particular concern to stakeholders in England. The current system was seen to be operating to a cycle which did not fully reflect the needs or flexibility of other stakeholders. Outwith these cycles, requests for changes are felt unlikely to be taken forward quickly.

However, SSCs had undertaken a series of steps to ensure that as organisations they were geared up to deliver the SSA. For example, ConstructionSkills undertook a detailed internal process to engage their large staff team. SEMTA allocated responsibility for individual actions to named staff, while e-skills UK allocated teams of staff to each of their eight propositions.

- Effectiveness

Stakeholders reported that they were seeking evidence upon which to base decisions and it would be helpful if SSCs could provide this evidence. SSCs believed that the process of developing an SSA had helped them to build an evidence base and credibility. This has enabled them to respond quickly to requests for information and to present a case for change. The SSA appears to have helped SSCs to achieve greater influence on the learning system.

SSCs referred to a series of improved relationships and outcomes from the SSA, noting that securing agreement meant they could approach other partners about its implementation. In this context there was a feeling of equality and strategic direction, as opposed to simply seeking funding where available. Following the typology developed in the Qualitative Evaluation, those influenced are organisations and individuals who fall into the '*direct operational influence*' group - not those closest to the network and its direction, but rather the next tier. That positive achievements are being registered by this group is encouraging and potentially significant for the influence of SSCs.

Other areas where actions set out in the SSA have been taken forward include projects aimed at attracting new entrants to the sector and at improving sector performance. Careers information, advice and guidance (IAG) was consistently identified by the Pathfinders in developing their SSAs, both to influence policy and strategy and to ensure that quality labour market information could reach individuals and employers. Other actions aimed to improve *sector performance*, such as industry validated Management & Leadership frameworks and Brokerage Projects to assist small companies. SSAs have resulted in additional services to employers.

A key issue is the need for information which is robust at national and regional level. This reflects the increasingly devolved nature of planning that is taking place across a number of stakeholders and also where sectoral definitions do not totally fit with those used by other stakeholders. This can lead to requests for information at a sub-sectoral level or for the SSC to engage with a range of other partners within and across regions. Some concern was noted that SSCs could still not fully demonstrate that they were truly representative of their sectors and it was felt important that SSCs go beyond requirements based on latent or research derived demand to demonstrate 'real' demand. This calls for additional levels of detail to be added to the analysis in some SSAs.

Various difficulties were reported. In having to align SSC objectives with national agencies, where government agendas are not fully consistent, SSCs lacked the authority to make other agencies change in response to their presentation of sector needs. SSCs appeared mainly to work through pilot or initiative funding rather than actually re-shaping mainstream provision. There is a further risk that this limited authority means that where SSCs propose more challenging changes other stakeholders may be more able to resist. In some cases SSCs thought that this was already happening.

There was also a diverse reaction across the nations and regions – SSCs experienced very different receptions to their proposals in different parts of the UK, reflecting the varying priorities of national and regional organisations, the extent of political will and individuals in agencies giving different responses to SSAs. The situation in England has been complicated by the wide range of regional and national agencies. Tensions in progressing implementation centred on ownership of the SSA or clarity of responsibility. A future difficulty anticipated is whether external partners will be able to continue to resource activities when other tranches of SSAs are in development.

Conclusion

The development and implementation of the SSA has brought considerable added value; the process creating awareness amongst partners of information and helping development of options. The formal designation of an SSA and statements of political support were perceived to help SSCs to engage employers. This in turn added credibility to an improved evidence base, allowing SSCs to respond or to propose changes based on more solid evidence. Further added value relates to the focus and structure of the SSC themselves - described as a shift from a "doing organisation to a strategic one." There are some frustrations that partners have not yet fully responded to SSA commitments, and indeed that the leverage of an SSC where this occurs is limited.

There appeared to be little consistency between SSCs in measuring progress. For network reporting, a summary of progress is set out in the Annual and Half Year performance report provided to the SSDA. The SSA tends to be covered in the report through a description of overall progress and structures – this is likely to limit

the extent to which common issues are recognised and addressed and to which the overall effect of the SSAs are seen.

Recommendations

1. SSCs should be cautious of putting forward too many actions in SSAs as this may limit stakeholders' sense of key priorities.
2. In developing future SSAs, SSCs must be clear about the increasing request for regional and local level data. The implications of this for data collection and presentation should be carefully considered for all involved.
3. Stakeholders with interests in commissioning and delivery must be engaged at an early stage and contact maintained throughout.
4. Stakeholders need to be informed about how SSA action plans are progressing. The effectiveness of recent changes to the six monthly Self Assessment Reports (SARs) should help with communicating the successes being generated through SSAs – but this needs to be monitored.
5. SSCs should be encouraged to report not simply on their success but also where and why it is not possible to achieve actions, for example where more complex institutional or statutory changes are required. In such instances, support may be required through the SSDA.
6. A key influence on the success to date appears to have been the level of political support which was perceived to surround the development of the four Pathfinder SSAs. Political support, may also be required for future SSA development and for generating delivery of key actions where partners are unable to agree a way forward.
7. The timeline, which has been developed for SSAs to be developed across the network, needs to reflect key times when influence can be achieved. Guidance may help to align expectations.

1 Introduction to the Research

EKOS / GEN Consulting were commissioned by the SSDA to report early progress and important developments from the implementation phase of Sector Skills Agreements (SSAs) since the Pathfinder report in 2005¹. This report is based on information gathered between January and July 2006, and so the evidence gathered and conclusions presented predates the publication of the Leitch Review of Skills². The report provides an interim update on progress until a fuller evaluation begins in 2007. As such it builds on the previous evaluation work by GHK, which concentrated on the development process, by seeking to understand how far progress has been made in delivering the agreed plans of the four Pathfinder SSCs³.

1.1 Background to SSAs

The nature and scope of SSAs was established in 21st Century Skills: Realising our Potential⁴. SSAs are designed to fundamentally alter the way skills are demanded, delivered and developed throughout the UK. They enable government, employers, employee representatives and organisations who plan, fund and support education and training to work together and tackle the provision of skills around a common set of objectives. SSAs analyse each sector's needs and provision and then create deals with the supply side to fill skills gaps and shortages. SSAs make sure the needs of employers form the starting point for future education and training. They are designed to ensure education meets the needs of UK business and public services. By mapping out exactly what skills employers need their workforce to have, and how these skills will be supplied, SSAs ensure the UK has the skilled workforce it needs to increase productivity and profitability, now and in the future. It is not surprising there are high expectations from all parties for changes in delivery and skill levels, and for these outcomes and achievements to be delivered quickly.

The delivery of SSAs is therefore a key element of the Skills for Business network. Explicit in the original policy remit was the commitment that the government would create the means for SSCs to exert strong influence throughout the system to help shape the supply of relevant training and skills and to raise employer commitment to skills. SSAs are intended to be the mechanism through which SSCs can achieve influence over the supply side together with the employers they represent.

The SSA process was designed to include five stages:

- Stage 1: A sophisticated assessment of sectors' needs to cover the long-term, medium-term and short-term, mapping the drivers of change in each sector and determining skill needs
- Stage 2: A review of the range, nature and employer relevance of current training provision across all levels
- Stage 3: An analysis of the main gaps and weaknesses in workforce development, leading to agreed priorities to be addressed

¹ Evaluation of the Pathfinder Sector Skills Agreement Process, SSDA Research Report 15:

<http://www.ssda.org.uk/ssda/pdf/051128%20R%20Research%20Report%2015%20web.pdf>

² http://www.hm-treasury.gov.uk/independent_reviews/leitch_review/review_leitch_index.cfm

³ A list of all SSCs and a description of their employer coverage is given in Appendix 1

⁴ <http://www.dfes.gov.uk/skillsstrategy/index.cfm?fuseaction=content.view&CategoryID=6>

- Stage 4: A review of the scope for collaborative action – engaging employers to invest in skills development to support improved business performance – and an assessment of what employers are likely to sign up to
- Stage 5: A final agreement of how the SSC and employers will work with key funding partners to secure the necessary supply of training.

This report focuses attention on progress from the end of Stage 5, namely the Implementation phase. It covers only the experiences of the first four SSCs to undertake the development of an SSA, referred to as Pathfinders. The objectives of this report are to:

- Provide a descriptive summary of progress made by the network with the SSAs
- Summarise the expectations that key external stakeholders and employers have of the SSAs
- Describe, drawing on the experiences of the Pathfinder SSCs, what is involved in the implementation phase of the SSA
- Review the progress made to date by the Pathfinder SSAs in terms of implementation of their action plans a year after the Pathfinder evaluation
- Summarise the aspirations the Pathfinder SSCs have for future development of their SSAs, identify any important blockages or barriers experienced or anticipated and support that might be needed
- Identify some of the key achievements/examples of good practice to come from the Pathfinder SSAs in terms of early impacts and
- Draw out the key lessons learnt over the last year and make recommendations for continuous improvement in SSA implementation moving forward.

The report focuses on the four Sector Skill Councils (SSCs) which were chosen to be Pathfinders for this process: ConstructionSkills; e-skills UK; SEMTA; and Skillset. These four SSCs were first to complete their SSAs. Others have recently completed or are due to follow over the next 18 months, as described more fully in the next chapter.

1.2 Methodology

This report builds on the wide-ranging consultation process undertaken by EKOS / GEN Consulting as part of the third phase evaluation of the network, which was conducted alongside the evaluation projects⁵. The previous consultations covered a wide-range of issues and were conducted at a point in time when the SSAs were still relatively newly signed. The key points from these consultations have been incorporated in to this document. To develop the evidence base further this study has:

- reviewed the SSA documents;
- consulted with each of the four Pathfinder SSCs;

⁵ For a full discussion of the evaluation see Skills for Business network Phase 3 Evaluation Main Report, Research Report 19: <http://www.ssda.org.uk/ssda/pdf/060831%20R%20Research%20Report%2019.pdf>.

- facilitated a workshop with the SSA team of the SSDA, and
- conducted consultations with a number of stakeholders who have been engaged in the delivery of key actions.

The stakeholders were identified through the SSCs and research focussed on those where significant progress was thought to have taken place.

1.3 Report structure

The remainder of this document is structured as follows:

- Chapter 2: summarises the SSA process and timetable
- Chapter 3: describes the expectations of SSCs, stakeholders and employers of SSAs
- Chapter 4: reviews progress on implementation of the Pathfinder SSAs
- Chapter 5: discusses issues emerging from the SSA process
- Chapter 6: draws conclusions on progress to date and provides some recommendations for the future

2 The SSA Process

2.1 Introduction

This section provides an update on overall delivery of the SSA policy following the Pathfinder phase. The SSCs are developing their respective SSAs in a series of tranches. This chapter describes the time period over which this is intended to take place and the progress being made.

2.2 Timetable for SSAs

The SSCs have been grouped into four tranches. Each tranche is due to start and finish at a different point in time, but with broadly similar elapsed time for each. This reflects the different stages of development of each SSC, including that some were licensed much later than others. Moreover, the intention was that the four Pathfinders would provide lessons for those coming afterwards. This seems particularly appropriate given that this is a new process for all involved.

The distribution of SSCs across each tranche is set out in Table 2.1 below.

Table 2.1: Summary of SSA timetable

Tranche 1 now completed SSA development <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ConstructionSkills • e-skills UK • SEMTA • Skillset 	Tranche 3 due to complete by June 2007 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Automotive Skills • Asset Skills • Improve • GoSkills • People 1st • Skills for Justice⁶
Tranche 2 target completion by Dec 2006 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cogent • Lantra • Skillfast-UK • SkillsActive UK • Skills for Health • Skills for Logistics 	Tranche 4 due to complete by Mar 2008 <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Energy & Utility Skills • Financial Services Skills Council • Skillsmart Retail • SummitSkills • Lifelong Learning UK • Skills for Care and Development • Creative and Cultural Skills • Proskills • Government Skills

The range of dates for completion has implications for partners including the workload involved in the development of the SSA and the fit of the outcomes with the planning cycles of other organisations. We return to these issues later in this report.

⁶ The Skills for Justice Plan is not due for launch until August 2007.

3 Expectations of SSAs

3.1 Introduction

This chapter describes the expectations that SSCs, stakeholders and employers held about SSAs and so provides the context in which implementation has taken place. It draws on interviews conducted by EKOS / GEN Consulting through the qualitative element of the evaluation study, where a number of people had been involved in the development process, and for this assignment. The evaluation study interviewed over 120 stakeholders who were grouped as having:

- **Strategic influence** - with a direct input to the policy direction and focus of the network, e.g. the DfES, DELNI, Scottish Executive, Welsh Assembly Government and DTI;
- **Direct operational influence** - having regular and often high-level operational contact with the network, e.g. funding councils such as HEFCE, the national LSC, Jobcentre Plus and the Highlands and Islands Enterprise and Scottish Enterprise, and/or
- **Distant operational influence** - having less frequent or direct contact with the network but in a position to influence operational activity of the network, its supply chain or its partners, e.g. RDAs, regional and local LSCs, Invest NI, local enterprise councils in Scotland and trade bodies.

At the time of the evaluation interviews few stakeholders were able to comment on the progress being made with the implementation of SSAs. Therefore, in the summer of 2006 around a dozen additional stakeholder interviews were conducted to gather this information. These interviews were targeted specifically at those with direct operational influence.

In these latter consultations we have also captured the views of the four Pathfinder SSCs and reflected the views captured in the earlier review of SSA implementation.

3.2 Overview of involvement

The respondents from outwith the SSCs had been involved with the SSA process in two main ways:

- attending consultation meetings or events to ascertain their views about the content of SSAs;
- acting as members of committees or groups responsible for developing and reviewing SSAs.

This involvement had left most respondents positive about the SSA process to date, finding that it had been:

- helpful in formalising linkages between SSCs and stakeholders;
- effective in bringing together employers and maintaining their interest, and
- inclusive in that a wide spectrum of employer views had been canvassed.

Some concerns were also raised about aspects of the process:

- a drawback of being inclusive was that it made the process time-consuming;
- there was uncertainty about how it would be kept up to date or implemented, and
- some employers perceived that the process had been taken over by key public agencies.

The employer perspective comes from a small number of those interviewed as part of the third phase evaluation of the Skills for Business network mentioned earlier⁷, which included some employers who had been involved in SSA development. This involvement had mainly been as part of the consultation process of the SSA, with employers then losing sight of what actions had subsequently been agreed and implemented.

There was also a perception among some employers that stemmed from the fact that in moving forward, the SSC and public agencies were acting together, at the risk of excluding employers, with what employers perceived to be a focus on public sector solutions within existing parameters, rather than a breakthrough change they might have hoped for.

3.3 Stakeholders' Expectations of SSAs

The respondents had several, but generally consistent, expectations of the outcomes of the SSA process, including:

- providing a strategic view of future sector needs;
- ensuring learning provision better met employer needs;
- improving competitiveness of UK businesses;
- raising skill levels within the sector;
- attracting younger people to the sector;
- influencing the content of qualifications, such as diplomas and degrees, and tailoring them to industry needs, and
- a detailed and costed action plan, which would be arrived at through consultation.

This expectation was built around the stages of the SSA process. In particular stakeholders anticipated a definitive view of the future labour market requirements in each sector from the Skills Needs Assessment (Stage 1). This would be strongly evidenced, both through quantitative and qualitative data. Moreover, where stakeholders operated in regional or local contexts they expected that the data

⁷ For a full discussion of the evaluation see Skills for Business network Phase 3 Evaluation Main Report, Research Report 19: <http://www.ssda.org.uk/ssda/pdf/060831%20R%20Research%20Report%2019.pdf>.

gathered would be disaggregated to this level of analysis. The guidance developed by the SSDA for subsequent stages should help to align expectations.

There was also an implicit assumption that each of the four SSAs would be relatively similar. That is, that each SSC would take a similar approach and that the structure of the final document would have many elements in common, even though the recommended actions arising could differ markedly. The SSDA produced guidance to this effect, but also recognised that different sectors would have different requirements.

What was less certain amongst those that we consulted was how their expectations of the SSA process and outcomes were to be realised. Indeed, several stakeholders acknowledged that they were not sure how the process would work out. This was a particular issue with SSAs but is to be expected given that the process was new for all concerned. Therefore, there was uncertainty about how development of each SSC would proceed, the extent to which stakeholders would be involved and the quality of what would be produced.

3.4 SSC expectations

It was recognised both by those we consulted and in the earlier GHK process review study that the development of an SSA was also new for the SSCs. Therefore, although guidance was produced, the Pathfinders recognised that they were breaking new ground. While they had high aspirations there was recognition that the process would evolve as issues arose and had to be addressed. The previous review recognised this issue and sought to align expectations. Its view was that an important outcome from the Pathfinder phase would be for the network more widely to learn the lessons in terms of identifying priorities and successfully engaging partners.

There were two key points among the expectations of SSCs that have raised issues as the process has developed. Firstly, there was uncertainty about the level of detail that should be included in the SSA. For all four SSCs this included the extent to which country or regional differences should be recognised. While all recognised that the country dimension would be a factor, it appears to have been under-played in some instances. Stakeholders in all countries expressed concern about this. Similarly, there was uncertainty as to how far regional plans needed to be developed; most simply, should England be covered by one plan, which is then broken down to the regional level, or an aggregation of a series of regional plans?

The SSCs acknowledged to differing degrees that national and regional issues had emerged during the process. Some SSCs had taken a decision at an early stage to adopt a more geographical approach. However, others had taken a more national view to begin with and then sought to differentiate geographically at a later stage. On occasion this causes considerable additional work for many partners and raised concerns amongst stakeholders as to how far variations in their area were being considered. Some others had had to adapt at a later stage. This is a key learning point from the Pathfinder process, which other SSCs should embrace.

In a similar vein some SSCs chose to focus on part of their footprint, for example SEMTA excluded the marine and bioscience elements. This caused some confusion and resistance with stakeholders who had expected the whole footprint to be covered and have then been asked at a much later date to comment on a second SSA by the same organisation, albeit with different focus. The supporting guidance provided to the later tranches should help to reduce such issues.

The second key issue, which has arisen around SSC expectations, is the extent to which the supply side would respond to the findings contained in the SSA. The SSA guidance talked of an action plan (costed where appropriate), and it appears that in the early stages SSCs believed that the supply side would respond quickly and fully to the evidence that they presented.

This again builds expectation on several levels. SSCs were confident that they would exert considerable influence, which would produce short term changes. This message appears to have been reflected back to employers in the sector. While this built SSC credibility and support, it may also have built expectations that were hard to deliver because of the lack of a direct lever to change the supply side immediately.

At the same time the supply side stakeholders were less sure how they would react to the plans. While they appreciated the degree of political support for SSAs, and this varied across the countries, they were:

- unsure what would be produced from the SSA;
- in some cases comfortable with existing patterns of provision and believed that small elements of fine tuning rather than great changes were required;
- committed to pre-existing funding and activity cycles for some time ahead, and
- driven by government targets, which were already set, even if the SSA identified a need for a different focus.

3.5 Moving to implementation

One SSC described the SSA as having two key features – a key mechanism for employers to identify their skills needs and gaps, and a series of deals between employers, funders, providers and the government to deliver those needs. The completion of the SSA was described as the beginning, not the end, with implementation and maintenance of the agreement the long-term task. The SSC therefore had to move focus into delivery at this point.

Stakeholders recognised this need for a change of emphasis amongst SSCs as the Agreement was signed. However, there was concern that this transition took longer to become apparent than was expected. The extent to which progress is now being made is the subject of the next chapter.

3.6 Conclusion

The overall messages to emerge from this section are that:

- there is a high level of expectation amongst SSCs that by producing an SSA they could bring about significant change. This was built into SSCs' approach to employers to build their support for the process;
- stakeholders developed an expectation of the SSA being a very high quality document, which would allow them to better plan provision at geographic or sub-sectoral levels, and

- stakeholders were uncertain about what would be produced and how they would be able to react. Pressures to meet existing delivery commitments, pre-existing funding and activity cycles and government targets have also hampered progress.

4 Review of progress of Pathfinder SSAs

4.1 Introduction

This chapter describes the early progress that has been made with each of the SSAs, the changes reported by SSCs and stakeholders, and the ways in which these have come about through the SSAs. It also identifies some of the key achievements and early impacts of Pathfinder SSAs. Brief case studies are used to illustrate areas of progress and achievement and we have indicated where appropriate which country the activity relates to – most apply across the UK.

4.2 SSC organisation

SSCs had undertaken a series of steps to ensure that as organisations they were geared up to deliver the SSA. The SSA is thus seen as an important and all encompassing initiative rather than a small peripheral activity.

For example, ConstructionSkills undertook a detailed internal process⁸ in the latter stages of developing the SSA to communicate and engage the large staff team of the SSC. This is considered to have effected a 'sea change' in the organisation, helping individuals and teams to understand better the internal and external interdependence necessary to achieve objectives and "to understand at a personal level in the organisation what this interdependency means." This internal development is considered crucial in a large organisation with significant levels of staffing involved in delivery of brokerage services and other direct operational activity working closely with partners.

The following example in Box 1 summarises the changes in management approach arising from the SSA process for ConstructionSkills:

⁸ 'Simpler, Faster, Closer: Driving Change, Delivering Fast, Achieving our Vision'

Box 1: Management Change in ConstructionSkills

ConstructionSkills describes the SSA as demonstrating the SSC's 'accountabilities and deliverables', with a change programme ('Simpler, Faster, Closer') providing organisational efficiency and effectiveness. During the development of its SSA ConstructionSkills undertook an organisational restructure, moving from eight Business Areas to seven Directorates, bringing delivery and strategy together in this more focused Directorate structure. The seven Directorates are:

- Skills Strategy
- Communication and Marketing
- Corporate Services
- National Construction College
- Managing Agency
- Field (including Managing Agencies in Scotland and Wales)
- Business Services (including VQ's and business support)

To ensure a distinction between the SSC remit and its wider activities a separate Awarding Body department was set up, thus Awarding Body activity has been separated from that of the Standards Setting Body.

Examples of how the reorganisation has affected operations of the SSC include: the OSAT (On Site Assessment and Training) team was brought into Business Services from the Field Directorate; the Greater London and East areas were combined; the SSC's area boundaries were realigned to the Regional Development Agencies in England; a new management structure was implemented in the Managing Agency with managers responsible for Northern and Southern England; a dedicated Programme-Led Apprenticeships Manager was designated; and to underline the importance of 'Changing Behaviours', a Competency Framework to help measure personal and organisational performance was introduced.

Further examples are provided by other SSCs. For instance SEMTA has now allocated responsibility for individual actions to named directors and senior staff, while e-skills UK has allocated teams of staff to each of the eight propositions underpinning their SSA. The regional managers of e-skills UK are intended to provide introductions to key contacts, but with the detailed work then taken forward by the specialist teams.

4.3 Overview of progress

Each of the four SSCs was relatively positive about elements of progress that had been made. The general sense was that while it was still fairly soon after the agreement had been made; the vast majority of the actions were proceeding to plan. This did not mean that all had been implemented or that discussion had been finalised, but there was some confidence around the direction and speed of travel. We discuss some of the achievements below.

That said, there appears to be no consistent way, within each of the SSCs, of measuring progress and this will need to be addressed as more SSCs progress through the implementation phase. For example:

- SEMTA has a system of monthly review – with key themes reported in a presentation format. In addition, a spreadsheet has been developed that contains a list of actions. This is monitored but it is a moving target, with discussions on one point leading to further actions being identified

- Each of the e-skills UK teams (8) has to do a monthly report of progress. Also, the co-ordinators of these teams meet every two weeks.

A summary of progress is then set out in the Annual and Half Year performance report each SSC provides to the SSDA. However, these reports are asked to cover much more than the SSA, indeed the reporting process predates the SSA. The SSA therefore tends to be covered in the report through a description of overall progress and structures, and specific achievements highlighted (although even here these are not always described as being part of delivery of the SSA). While the SSCs view this as a strength, as it reduces their need to report and ensures embedding of the SSA process in their main business planning and activities, it does mean that there is no consistent view of progress against each of the actions set out in the SSA. Although this is not necessarily a problem at individual SSC level (given that management processes are robust), lack of identifiable progress reporting on a regular basis is likely to limit the extent to which common issues (for SSCs or stakeholders) are recognised and addressed at network level by SfB and to which the overall effect of the SSAs are seen in relation to wider capacity building work by SSCs and partners⁹.

4.4 Key achievements

The SSCs were able to list a series of key achievements in terms of the delivery of actions in each of their SSAs. These fall into three main groupings which are discussed in turn below:

- being able to operate from a position of authority as sector experts;
- developing relationships with key stakeholders and influencing policy and the supply side, and
- bespoke sector initiatives.

Being able to operate from a position of authority

SSCs believed that the process of developing an SSA had helped them to build credibility and an evidence base allowing them to become a source of expert sectoral advice. This has enabled them to respond quickly to requests for information and also to present a case for change to stakeholders from a stronger position. The improved evidence developed through the SSA provides a basis on which to support proposed actions and is helping SSCs achieve greater influence.

For example, ConstructionSkills have established observatory groups in each English region and in Scotland to support the production of robust labour market intelligence. This again illustrates the point about SSCs achieving influence through the collection and use of robust labour market information.

⁹ Since the research was conducted the structure of the annual and half year performance reports has been changed to give a consistent and regular view of SSA implementation and development across all SSCs.

Box 2: Construction Skills Network

The Construction Skills Network (CSN) collates the knowledge and experience of government, SSCs, construction companies, education and training providers, regional agencies and customers across the UK to provide a single, clear consensus of understanding of the industry's current skills position and future skills and training needs.

The CSN uses a central Forecasting Model which analyses capacity, productivity and skills to predict employment and training requirements. The Network is then engaged to review and challenge any assumptions used in the modelling as well as to inform the model with current views and issues on construction and the wider economy.

Three groups make up the CSN: Observatory Groups; the National Group; and the Technical Reference Group. The National and Observatory Groups, which include representatives from the construction industry, education and government, work together to help identify prospective skills needs and issues, which are developed and refined through feedback and cross-analysis. The aim is to achieve effective planning and investment through sharpening and honing the understanding of skills needs.

While formal publication of forecasts is annual, data is available and refined throughout the year. The CSN supports at least two observatory meetings per year in each region and the national and technical reference group also meet at least twice a year.

It is encouraging that stakeholders reported that they were seeking evidence upon which to base decisions and that if SSCs could provide this it would be helpful in many respects. This varied from planning bodies, which wanted to make more informed decisions around supply, to other sector bodies, wishing for higher quality labour market information to help plan or market themselves appropriately. As such the SSA has helped SSCs to achieve greater influence on the learning system than they could beforehand. Not only has the learning system been influenced but so too have governments' understanding of the economic importance of skills. This was highlighted by Skillset presented in Box 3.

Box 3: Creative Economy Programme consultation - England

In November 2005 the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) launched the Creative Economy Programme (CEP) to support the goal of making the UK the world's creative hub and consider how to harness activity and potential to compete effectively. Initial work was centred on seven issues including education and skills, business support, diversity and technology, which are considered important productivity drivers for the creative industries. In what Skillset consider one of their 'single biggest wins' to have come out of the SSA process, the SSC was able to respond very rapidly to a series of strategic enquiries across these issues which were undertaken in a short timescale. The research, analysis and thinking processes included within the SSA across all sub-sectors led to Skillset being able to respond not just to education and skills issues, but with a wider perspective on economic benefits and possible actions/solutions across all RDA areas. Skillset's capacity to respond to the consultation with both data and reasoned proposals (of 'having information and arguments') has supported their involvement in further consultations as the CEP develops.

Discussions around the SSA process have also helped SSCs to influence employer needs, commitment and continued strategic investment in the workforce. A further example of this is provided by Skillset in Box 4.

Box 4: Skillset Film Industry Training Board

The Skills Investment Fund (SIF) was launched in 1999 and over 320 productions have now contributed around £4m. The SIF supports initiatives through *A Bigger Future*, Skillset and UK Film Council's five year film skills strategy covering everyone working in film from development through to exhibition. It has helped pay for over 250 new entrant production trainees, more than 650 bursaries for film practitioners to access their chosen training and provided subsidised courses, seminars and master classes attended by more than 3,500 people from across the industry.

Following consultation with the film industry through the SSA process, which looked widely at the needs of the film industry and contributed to the development of the strategy, businesses in the industry recognised and supported the need to invest more strategically (and substantially) in labour force development across the industry. Contributions to the SIF are currently voluntary with a compliance rate of around 50% from employers. As a result of the recognition within the industry of the need for a collective, centralised approach and support for investment, the levy is to become mandatory with the establishment of the Skillset Film Industry Training Board (SFITB). Skillset and the Department of Culture, Media and Sports (DCMS) are working together to establish the SFITB, which requires an Act of Parliament. It is expected that the levy will become mandatory at the end of 2007.

Fulfilling the role as sectoral expert adviser was seen to be easier for some SSCs than others. The more difficult position was where other employer-based 'sectoral bodies' already existed, for example in covering specific professions within sectors. Where the SSC was in effect filling a gap, it was perceived to have an advantage. However, where such professional bodies existed the opportunity exists for SSCs to pool information from these professional bodies and set it within a wider sector context, thereby demonstrating the added value of the Skills for Business network.

Developing relationships with key stakeholders to gain influence

In a similar vein SSCs noted that having developed an agreement meant that they could then approach other partners about its implementation. Key in this respect are those second tier stakeholders with direct operational influence, as it is often from this level that changes in delivery will be driven.

They believed that the SSA helped to change the nature of this conversation from one where the SSC was asking for money for what might be perceived as small projects, to one where the need had been evidenced and agreed in a wider strategic context and so the SSC was seeking to work alongside the partner to take forward a broader raft of action. In this context there was a much greater feeling of equality and strategic direction, as opposed to simply seeking funding where it might be available. These changes have led to a series of benefits that are most readily understood at the organisational level.

For example, the development of SSAs has led to the LSC significantly revising its commissioning process. In the past the LSC has planned sectorally, but not specifically to SSCs or SSAs. Now SSAs are in place the LSC has had to look at planning processes specific to SSAs – "the consistent, embedded approach wouldn't have happened without SSAs". The QCA has also restructured its operation to align with SSC sectors.

The SSA process has led SSCs to increased and different work with other partners such as the QCA, RDAs and awarding bodies in England and their equivalents in

other nations. In Scotland these include, the economic development agencies, Highlands and Islands Enterprise and Scottish Enterprise, the Scottish Funding Council for further and higher education and the Scottish Qualifications Authority. In Wales, SSCs need to work with the Welsh Assembly Government, which incorporates FE funding and economic development functions and also the Qualifications, Curriculum and Assessment Authority for Wales (ACCAC). The situation in Northern Ireland is currently simpler with SSCs working primarily with the Department for Employment and Learning (DELNI) and the QCA Northern Ireland. The outcomes from this have been seen by SSCs, for example:

- e-skills UK has now agreed with the LSC (and the QCA) that they will only fund ITQ linked qualifications. They view this as endorsement of the ITQ which the SSC has developed;
- SEMTA has been able to make direct input to COVE re-accreditation and has agreed a pilot programme of Level 3 qualifications for the sector.

For Jobcentre Plus the realisation of the potential benefits of SSAs came at Stage 3 for the Pathfinders, when it became clear that Jobcentre Plus could have a role in providing solutions to identified gaps and shortages. Consequently the agency has been much more engaged with subsequent tranches of SSA development. It has distinguished between sectors, believing some are much more relevant to its work than others. Where joint opportunities are identified the agency has to share and fit its own targets and customer profiles. For example where there has been ministerial instruction to reduce the numbers of invalidity benefit claimants or to increase the numbers of women returners. It considers the SSCs it has worked with very responsive to addressing these needs.

The SSCs also recognised the benefits of working closely with Jobcentre Plus. Again, they saw this as a clear development from the SSA process, with previously loose relationships becoming much closer. There were examples from SEMTA and ConstructionSkills for instance. SEMTA now meets the agency monthly to ensure progress is made on key actions. They have developed a project around having skill coaches who can go out and inform people what the sector is really like to work in (so overcoming image problems). Jobcentre Plus has identified ex-engineers for this role and similarly has worked with other people with appropriate skills and experience to convert them into trainers and assessor/verifiers to meet a recognised shortage.

Jobcentre Plus is also participating in a number of the regional forums established by ConstructionSkills. In addition, Jobcentre Plus has been working closely with ConstructionSkills in the North West of England, where the two organisations are involved jointly in a number of initiatives. Both are on the management board of a Housing Market Renewal initiative in East Lancashire and both are also involved in the 'Elevate' scheme to raise aspiration and access through involving schools in projects run by a local authority. Collaboration of this type has helped Jobcentre Plus achieve higher levels of access for its clients for pre-entry training, entry level and employed status training opportunities.

HEFCE engagement with the Pathfinders in England is also evident and has largely focussed on two of the four, i.e. Skillset and e-skills UK. This reflects the nature of the activities identified, with these two SSCs making a case for short-term, project style activity, while other issues require longer term change. While HEFCE does not have a planning function, it is able to meet short-term needs through its Strategic Development Fund. This has been used for example to support the development of

Skillset's Screen Academies in England through the allocation of additional numbers (see Box 5).

Box 5: Skillset Screen Academy Network

Research for the SSA on how the film industry viewed existing training and education provision identified a high level of confusion about quality and how employers should engage. The Skillset Screen Academy Network developed as a demand led programme based on the industry's recognition of its responsibility to be clear on its needs and expectations. Working strategically with FE and HE partners, centres of excellence were identified and Skillset invited bids to develop a network of Screen Academies and a specialist Film Business Academy. Each Screen Academy is a partnership of industry with HE and FE and together the Network provides courses covering the full range of jobs in the industry. The Higher Education funding bodies in each country have put forward appropriate proposals for supporting Skills Academies and the funding complements resources committed through Skillset, which provides bursaries and outreach support. From Skillset's perspective this programme has reinforced the benefits of employer response and supports the language and rhetoric of 'a done deal' in ongoing discussion in the industry.

In England, the Screen Academies were HEFCE's first formal agreement with an SSC as part of the SSA process. HEFCE were attracted to the Screen Academy concept by:

- it being a specialist area and so one that could be addressed through targeted action
- the employer input to the design and development, meaning that in effect there was co-financing of the development, and that
- the offering to HEIs was much more "carrot than stick" in effect offering them resources to offer new provision.

This was made easier by the considerate way in which HEFCE felt Skillset handled the process. For example, once the concept was developed, HEIs were asked to bid to be part of the initiative. These bids were made to Skillset, but the Chief Executive of HEFCE was invited to sit on the selection panel. This gave HEFCE confidence, but also showed the significance of the development.

Similarly, HEFCE reserved overall places for students who register for the e-skills UK developed undergraduate degree. This was the first time that this had been done, demonstrating HEFCE's flexibility of response but also a positive approach to the SSA process. This new approach followed the nature of e-skills UK as a sector body – being able to put the case for change across a range of institutions. In effect an outside body was promoting a change in the provider structure.

It is important to note the nature of the stakeholders described above. Following the typology developed in the Qualitative Evaluation, these are organisations and individuals who fall in to the *direct operational influence* group. As such they are not those closest to the network and its strategic direction, but rather the next tier. That positive achievements are being registered by this group is encouraging and potentially significant for the influence of SSCs moving forward as it is here the real gains will be made.

Across all of these issues, SSCs referred to a series of improved relationships and outcomes from the SSA including the types we have described above. These developments were not always with the same partners or stakeholders reflecting the different focus of each stakeholder or partner and the ways in which the needs identified by the SSC mapped to their priorities.

4.5 Individual Sector Initiatives

The SSA has also provided a mechanism to develop specific initiatives to achieve key actions. These have included projects aimed at attracting new entrants to the sector and at improving wider sector performance.

Creating Learning Opportunities for all Individuals

The topic of careers information, advice and guidance (IAG) was consistently identified by the Pathfinders in developing their SSAs, with needs identified both to influence policy and strategy and to ensure that high quality labour market information could reach individuals and employers. Skillset has project managed a DfES-funded project to lead 11 other SSCs to develop their industry careers strategies and labour market information, the outcomes of which will strengthen the Skills for Business network in the careers arena. Specific examples from this project include:

- e-skills UK is developing new employer endorsed careers material, and working with those individuals offering careers advice, to ensure that the information they provide offers the most up to date and attractive view of the sector. e-skills UK's Go4IT programme has been delivered in London and Scotland and has given groups of young people the chance to gain a wider understanding of the technology careers that are available to them.
- In delivery terms Skillset has built on its longstanding service to freelancers and has developed and delivered IAG products and services based on up to date labour market information and intelligence including e-mail, telephone and one-to-one careers advisory services. As agreements develop the scale and range of services is increasing significantly.

In addition, there have been a variety of sector approaches to developing wider careers and learning opportunities. Two examples are presented below and a further example is presented in Box 6.

- There are now more than 34,000 girls in more than 1,800 schools engaged in Computer Clubs for Girls (CC4G), e-skills UK's flagship programme to address the under representation of women in technology careers. 66% of those participating report that they are more likely to consider a career in technology as a result. The roll-out across England is on plan, and successful pilot projects have been undertaken in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland
- ConstructionSkills Wales, in conjunction with the WAG, has been involved in developing the Wales Housing Quality Standard Toolkit and is working at the strategy stage with a number of local authorities who are undertaking work to meet the WAG Welsh Housing Quality Standard. In conjunction with Newport City Council, they are producing the Construction Employment Charter, which encourages contractors to recruit local people and commit to training. They are also working closely with the heads of the Valley Partnership, which

includes five local authorities. They recently launched their Construction and Training Consortium Charter, which supports the delivery of the SSA. Similar programmes are replicated with a number of local authorities across Wales

Box 6: Skillset guidance service

Skillset Careers now works with trade unions, trade associations and industry employers to improve the quality of information and advice given in schools, further and higher education and through public agencies. Advice is also provided direct to individuals across the UK, which is an essential service given the large number of freelance workers in the sector. The following statistics give some indication of the scale and nature of activity:

- Of over 350 face-to-face guidance sessions provided in early 2006, 60% were primarily production and 40% performance related
- 32% of those seeking support were new entrants and 68% were experienced practitioners with 2 or more years Audio Visual industry experience
- 95% of clients were based in England, 4% in Wales, 1% in Scotland. None were from NI in this period
- 57% of those supported were female, approximately 25% were from BME groups and 10% specified a disability
- 90% were satisfied with the service by stating it met or exceeded their expectations
- 45% of sessions were funded by European Social Fund, 40% through Union Learning Fund (England), 7% through SIF and 3% through WAG funding (Wales)

Improved Sector Performance

A variety of sector projects have also been developed to improve sector performance. Some examples are provided below:

- ConstructionSkills has implemented an industry validated Management & Leadership framework, now available under licence as a web-based assessment tool. The SSC is seeking to enhance the framework through continuous evolution by adding sustainability and lean manufacturing skill sets
- SEMTA is undertaking a Sector Brokerage Project funded by DfES to engage 950 small companies to assist them in developing the skills of their workforces. The SSC has also secured LSC funding of £20 million for NVQs at Level 3 for employers in the West Midlands and North West regions

Box 7: SEMTA's review process

As part of the development of the SSA, SEMTA identified that many employers indicated that they knew what training/skills they needed – but not where to find it, while providers were of the view that employers could not articulate their needs. To address this, SEMTA developed a review process for employers, covering;

- Business into skills needs
- Productivity
- Benchmarking performance
- Qualifications and training required at different levels of the organisation

This review product is delivered by SEMTA's advisers, with over 600 companies taking part. As a result of positive feedback, SEMTA is now:

- Aiming to support a further 200 companies
- Re-visiting half of those seen so far for follow up work
- Developing the tool further into an IT based product

5 Issues Emerging from Pathfinder SSA process

5.1 Overview

From the above discussion it seems that much good progress has been made through the four Pathfinder SSAs. Moreover, processes are in train and discussion is taking place, which should lead to further benefits in the future. A key question then is how far these benefits can be attributed to the SSA process, or whether they could have been achieved through less formal, more traditional approaches to partnership working.

The general consensus across the consultees was that while much could have been achieved otherwise, the development and implementation of the SSA has brought considerable added value. The SSA process has created opportunities to increase awareness amongst partners and discuss evidence and development options with SSCs. Through the SSA, a process was set, which led SSCs to engage more fully with stakeholders and in turn meant that stakeholders had to engage more fully with the SSC. In this sense access, information and communication were all improved and this has created a means to agree actions.

Supporting this process are three key elements which reinforce each other:

- There was a general sense of considerable political will behind the Pathfinders. Where this was strongest there was real pressure on the other stakeholders to respond positively to the proposals being put forward. SSCs believed that this was helping them to secure discretionary funds. What was less certain amongst the consultees was the extent to which this explicit political support had continued into the implementation phase or was being offered to subsequent tranches.
- The formal designation of an SSA and statements of political support were perceived to help SSCs to engage employers in the process. This in turn adds credibility to the evidence base and the outcomes proposed.
- The SSA process meant that SSCs developed a much improved evidence base about their sector. This allowed them to respond to requests for information or to propose changes based on more solid evidence. Where this worked best stakeholders were appreciative of the ability it offered them to take better, more informed decisions.

The final element, which has provided perceptions of added value, relates to the impact of SSAs on the focus and structure of the SSC themselves. Several SSCs felt that as organisations they are now much more selective about what they will do. One described this shift as being from a “doing organisation to a strategic one.” While this outcome may be intangible it is potentially very important. It demonstrates SSCs moving to a position, which they were expected to fill, and which differentiates them clearly from the predecessor National Training Organisations (NTOs).

Within this positive picture however, there are some wider implementation issues being experienced across the SSCs with their SSA which may need to be tackled to enhance their future effectiveness and impact. These issues relate to:

- Stakeholder expectations
- Geographical expectations

- Partner responsiveness as a factor in making progress towards objectives
- SSA footprint and system capacity

The following sections deal with each of these in turn.

5.2 Stakeholder expectations

Stakeholders have relatively high-level expectations, in effect focussed on their strategic ends and reflecting the broad rhetoric which surrounded SSAs. While this type of promotion of expected benefits is not uncommon, particularly by Ministers, it does build expectations that can on occasion be hard to meet.

Perhaps the most common issue described is the difficulties that can be faced in having to align SSC objectives with those of national agencies. These difficulties represent a series of systemic and agency tensions where government agendas are not fully consistent across organisations. Moreover, from the SSC perspective, while they are required to present employers' views and needs, they lack the authority to make other agencies change in response to this presentation, which they reflect risks losing the commitment of the employers. Employers may then perceive that the process has been overtaken by public agencies.

There was also some concern amongst stakeholders as to how far the action plan would be based on true agreement, or whether SSCs would seek to impose changes. Some stakeholders appeared to want clear guidance from SSCs as to what actions they should take, while others were much less willing to accept such views. Where the latter occurred in the development phase, issues appear to have continued at implementation. This led to SSCs being frustrated at the perceived non-responsiveness of some stakeholders, while the latter believed that SSCs were not being sufficiently aware of the wider range of pressures under which they operated. One SSC talked of difficulties trying to get a key element of their plan funded, while the organisation they were approaching believed it was the wrong one to receive this approach.

A significant example of such tensions concerns the impact of nationally imposed PSA targets in England. While the LSC is understandably focussed on its Level 2 PSA target, a number of SSAs have identified a greater need at Level 3 as identified by their employers. The SSCs had hoped that the evidence produced in the SSA would lead to a change in this focus, but although increased flexibilities have been built into initiatives such as Train to Gain as yet this has not been the general case in LSC commissioning. This is not to say that the LSC has been unresponsive. Indeed, as noted elsewhere in the report, the opposite has been true in several significant occasions. However, the sense from the SSCs is that they mainly have to work through pilot or initiative funding rather than actually re-shaping mainstream provision as had been expected at the start of the SSA process. This potential need for sector bodies to have sufficient authority if they are to be effective was identified from an international comparison of sectoral skills policies for the SSDA¹⁰.

5.3 Geographical expectations

Another key issue occurring across the SSCs is in dealing with differences of reaction across the nations and regions. The international comparative study referred to above observed the potential tension between nationally driven education

¹⁰ Ashton (2006) Lessons from Abroad – SSDA Catalyst Issue 2 .
<http://www.ssda.org.uk/ssda/default.aspx?page=2491>

and training policy and the federal approach of SSCs and drew parallels between these tensions and those experienced in other countries with 'two tier' approaches. This can hinder attempts to influence. In one sense these differences are similar to dealing with different stakeholder perspectives described above.

However, the position is more complex geographically. From the SSCs' point of view they have developed a set of evidence to make the case for a particular intervention, but are given very different receptions to their proposals in different parts of the UK. These differences appear to reflect differences in:

- priorities of national and regional organisations
- extent of political will towards SSCs in each of the nations
- personalities giving different responses to SSAs even within the same organisations

The overall picture is not however simply one of more progress being made in one country than the others. One SSC explained that although the early progress with their SSA was made in England, they subsequently considered the other countries to have made more substantial progress. They now anticipate that in Wales, following organisational re-structuring to a new government division, there is strong commitment to carry forward the actions, with strong partnerships already in place by the time the Action Plan was prepared. Similarly in Scotland the development phases of the SSA are felt to have encouraged very good discussion, "a new culture and way of thinking that we can only see deepening and strengthening". The structure and language of the SSA Action Plans for each country are therefore felt to reflect the nature of these partnerships and commitment as well as the actions determined.

Conversely, for this SSC the situation in England has been complicated by the wide range of regional and national agencies to be included. In effect this SSC is now regionalising its SSA and underpinning management arrangements, with different priorities according to sub-sector in the various regions. Consequently a key challenge of checking the focus and progress of the England SSA is of constantly aggregating up and disaggregating back to the English regions from the England wide sector committees.

A very different position was described by one of the other SSCs, which has focused disproportionately on England in the first instance, having taken a relatively low key approach in both Scotland and Wales as they sensed lukewarm support for many of the actions in the SSA. Their hope was to build an evidence base from their experiences and actions in England and so generate further credibility.

5.4 Partner responsiveness

Another implementation issue affecting progress concerns the effects of varying partner responsiveness. Indeed there is evidence that where progress has been made this is very often where another partner has been most responsive. This is a natural condition, with organisations wishing to progress and reinforce achievements rather than tackle new areas.

However, the risk is that in the longer term, more difficult changes may fall behind. This risk needs to be monitored in the coming periods. Such issues of failing to progress the most difficult challenges are most likely where the SSA action is in

effect an 'agreement to talk' rather than a direct commitment (expanded on below). Indeed, a frustration for some SSCs was the extent to which partners - having signed to actions - then appeared to expect the SSC to take actions forward unilaterally or otherwise failed to follow up on an earlier discussion. This tension centred on ownership of the SSA or clarity of responsibility for the actions contained therein. While partners may have signed these documents the perception of SSCs was that the degree of subsequent commitment varied considerably. Raising awareness and reminding partners of this joint responsibility remained a key task for SSCs as managers or custodians of the partnership agreements.

5.5 SSA 'footprint' and system capacity

A further issue faced by several of the Pathfinders is coverage of their whole sector footprint. Where this has not been done at the outset, work is now on-going to fill the gaps. While Pathfinders received specific funds to support development of the SSAs, availability of funding for the remaining sectors is not considered a significant issue. Rather the difficulty anticipated is whether external partners will be able to resource the activities seen as needed for these additional sectors in a period when other tranches of SSAs are in development. There is considered to be a combined risk that in a phase where core support for SSA development has ended, the SSC may have reduced support at a political level for securing the additional agreements and implementing subsequent agreements reached.

5.6 Implications from early implementation for future SSAs

The following section draws out a number of specific learning points and lessons acquired from stakeholders involved in the SSA process with stakeholders to date.

Reaching Agreement

The starting point for each SSC was the completion of the Agreement. This involves both the formal document and the negotiations with partners, which took place around the action plan element. The style of the four Pathfinder documents varies considerably. At the simplest level of analysis they are very different in length and the level of detail contained.

More significant however are the differences in the number and nature of proposed solutions. The SSA developed by e-skills UK is perhaps the most straightforward. It identified eight areas of action. The number of actions increases in each of the others, with ConstructionSkills plan for England being similar to e-skills UK in that it details 13 proposed solutions and Skillset's Agreement sets out 19. By way of contrast the SEMTA plan has almost 50 actions identified, covering over nine pages.

Alongside the number of actions it is important to recognise that the level of detail assigned to each action varies considerably. At the extremes are:

- very specific actions along the lines of... *"we will deliver x of an activity by time y..."*
- proposed solutions, which in effect are action points to hold further discussions – 'agreement to talk'.

The SSCs and stakeholders recognised this difference. In part this reflected that while some actions are very project focussed some of the others deal more with

changing other parts of the system through influence and advocacy. Moreover, the SSA's phrasing reflected the extent to which the SSC and its partners, in developing the plan, were able to agree a specific action, or indeed in some cases further evidence gathering or discussion was required to specify the correct response. Therefore, while the more general type of action point appears to diverge significantly from the original expectation of an SSA it is not necessarily a weakness of the approach. Rather it can reflect the sensitivity and challenge of some of the issues involved, which is then set against the need to adhere to relatively strict timelines. This can become a frustration for all concerned.

That said there were occasions where this style of language has been used to mask a disagreement between the SSC and another stakeholder about a proposed solution. In the timescale available to sign the plan it was apparently felt better to keep the discussion open than pursue a level of agreement which would not be forthcoming. It appears that where such situations have occurred subsequent progress has often been limited. This reflects that at the time of the SSA being developed there was significant political support to drive change. This is now perceived to have declined and so if, for whatever reason, the SSC was unable to exploit that opening at a point in time, making progress thereafter has been difficult. This relates to the relative power of SSCs and some key stakeholders: SSCs can make the case for change but lack a true lever to drive this. This issue has been experienced by sector bodies in other countries¹¹ where influence of delivery or control of funding is lacking.

Implementing the Agreement

Consistency of presentation

While stakeholders recognised how and why the Pathfinder documents had ended up so different, many reflected that the variety in presentation did not easily support understanding key differences in requirements or actions in the contents. This may be an issue of presentation but some element of consistency would also assist stakeholders to more quickly understand the key messages and to read across the documents to compare issues around resource allocation. To help tackle this the SSDA has created guidance on SSA development for subsequent SSCs working through the process and further monitoring of consistency and ease of use will be worthwhile in maintaining stakeholder support.

Planning cycles and timescales

Each of the stakeholders raised a number of issues around both the development and implementation of the SSAs, which they felt would facilitate progress. These were made from a constructive base, wishing that more could be gained from the process and to inform SSCs in subsequent tranches. *The common theme across all of the issues raised could be described as one of SSCs having to understand the needs and constraints of the partner organisations.*

This theme was raised from a number of perspectives, in particular by English stakeholders who were aware of the need to integrate SSA actions with the plans of various partners and at both national and regional level. There was seen to be a need to understand the operational remit, business cycles and timescales of each organisation. This is complex as it varies for each stakeholder. It was expressed from several perspectives:

¹¹ Lessons from Abroad, SSDA Catalyst Issue 2
<http://www.ssda.org.uk/ssda/default.aspx?page=2491>

- while some bodies are able to plan provision in other sectors there is a much more ground level process. In the latter cases, appeals to the national body to enforce change simply cannot be delivered. Rather, the SSC has to seek to work to advocate change at different levels
- the nations may have different policy priorities set by Ministers. In such cases proposed actions, which help to address such over-riding issues, are more likely to gain additional resources than those that sit outside
- large organisations and indeed systems often operate to a planning cycle. This will have key points at which information can be input and then fed into changes in activity. Outwith these cycles, requests for changes are unlikely to be taken forward quickly. This causes frustration on all sides

The issue of timescales was raised by almost every consultee. There were concerns that the current system was operating to a cycle which did not fully reflect the needs or flexibility of other stakeholders. An example cited by partners was that the timing of the sign-up of some SSAs was not at the most appropriate point in the partner's budgeting and commissioning cycle, leading to perceived delays while the implementation of actions was synchronised or aligned with business processes.

The phased introduction of SSAs is a barrier in this respect and the point was made that in future a set of rolling documents, all synchronised with key annual points in the budgeting/commissioning cycles, would be more appropriate and could evolve naturally. Yet such changes can take several years to feed through, for example in the context of higher education. It was thought important that SSCs understood this and managed expectations (for example of employers) as well as processes accordingly.

Robust information

Across many stakeholders a key and growing issue is the need for information, which is robust at national and regional level. Starting with the wider issues of robustness, there was some concern that SSCs could still not in all cases demonstrate that they were truly representative of their sectors. In this sense it was perceived to be important that SSCs can go beyond describing requirements based on latent demand to demonstrating 'real' demand. There appears to be an expectation that SSCs will deliver individual employers to providers as well as research and define demand. Part of this is the expectation of outcomes from a parallel process by the SSC to drive up and engage this 'real' demand during the planning/agreement stages and not to wait, for example, until the training places requested are confirmed and available. One stakeholder in England noted that there have been examples of providers failing to fill programmes offered in response to stated demand.

This requirement for robust data is increasingly at regional or even local level. This reflects the increasingly devolved nature of planning that is taking place across a number of stakeholders. Part of the process of building confidence discussed above would be through engaging a wider range of stakeholders in the initial SSA stages, especially at regional/local level. Perhaps most significant in this is the LSC in England, where under new structures regional sector teams will have roles at same status as national office. They will address both policy and programme level issues, e.g. funding older workers, reshaping programmes to sector needs, etc. A key issue is the level and type of qualification and provision needed and this is where the SSCs can bring forward regional level information in a form that the regional LSC can use to shape the purchasing process, which will be driven at regional level.

Sector Footprints

In a similar vein, SSCs face a challenge in operating to sectoral definitions that do not always fit with those used by other stakeholders. This can lead to requests for information at a sub-sectoral level or for the SSC to engage with a range of different other groupings. This is probably inevitable in the foreseeable future but does have resource implications for SSCs to be able to translate their sector research and ensure it is recognised and valued by stakeholders.

Three other points were made which are useful in guiding future SSA activity:

- stakeholders are more likely to be able to respond to one or two issues rather than a high number. This is largely about capacity, but would also demonstrate reflection and prioritisation by the SSC. This sense of securing priority would be further supported by SSCs being clear about what success would look like
- while much of the focus of SSCs has been on driving change in the supply side, the stakeholders believe that SSCs also need to encourage employers to take responsibility. For example, simply providing more learning places will not lead to an increase in the labour supply if the sector is not attractive
- some of the actions taken to date may be not always be replicable in the future. This is especially the case where discretionary funds have been allocated to support activity, but also if partners cannot maintain levels of staff resources to sustain close relationships across all SSCs in the way many have developed with the Pathfinders. It is therefore important for SSCs to be close to the stakeholders in the early stages of developing the Agreement to ensure that the solutions proposed can be taken forward

6 Conclusions and Recommendations

6.1 Introduction

This final chapter draws on the evidence gathered above to draw out a number of conclusions. These are followed by a list of best practice points noted during the consultation phase of the study. Finally we propose some recommendations for the future development and delivery of SSAs.

6.2 Conclusions

The analysis presented above points to a number of conclusions around the early implementation of SSAs:

- overall the progress reported is encouraging with each of the four SSCs able to point to key achievements so far, and with more expected in the future
- key stakeholders recognise these achievements and in several cases reported that they had become more responsive to SSCs through the SSA process. This is a result of the improved evidence SSCs are able to bring and improved communications
- the initial expectation of SSAs as strategic change documents was very demanding, with many uncertain how this would be achieved
- where progress is being made it is most often where stakeholders have been willing to engage and are more responsive
- the Pathfinder SSA documents each look and feel very different – in effect there is not a standard product. More defined guidance has been available for later tranches developing their SSAs, but a key point in approach is that stakeholders have found it easier to engage where the list of actions is relatively small, so appearing to reflect a prioritisation
- there was, and remains, tension as to how far SSCs through the SSA are intended to direct other stakeholders or should seek to work in collaboration with them
- a key barrier to progress in some areas is a discontinuity between the findings of the SSA and the wider policy requirements placed on other stakeholder organisations. Similarly change can be delayed by stakeholders who wish to focus on other priorities

- where changes have occurred they are most often around project or piloted activity, rather than systemic changes or revisions to key priorities. In his summary of the international comparison of sectoral skills policies for the SSDA Ashton commented that *“SSCs cannot function effectively if their operations are constrained or contradicted by other components of the VET system...crucially the flow of funding, delivery of skills through the vocational education system...and the objectives of other relevant government agencies”*¹²
- there remain issues about the level of national and regional analysis and differentiation within the SSA
- there are key points in the year when stakeholders are most likely or able to respond to requests for change. The current SSA timeline does not reflect this

6.3 Emerging lessons

The experience of the Pathfinders to date suggests a number of lessons:

- Agreement and action plans need to include articulation from employers on what success would look like for them and to focus on key issues and priorities
- A balance needs to be struck on scale, with fewer priorities perhaps being more impressive and attainable
- SSAs will have implications for internal SSC and stakeholder organisation. Recognition of this will help when it comes to developing and taking forward actions
- The discussions with partners will be complex and the earlier these start the more chance there is of agreeing detailed actions
- The plans need to reflect the differences at national, regional and sub-sectoral level, given the resources available to SSCs
- There is an expectation among some stakeholders for SSCs to ensure that research derived demand (described as ‘perceived’ demand by some stakeholders) is clearly supported at implementation by actual demand to reinforce to local funders/providers that employers are there to take up provision supplied.

6.4 Recommendations

The conclusions and emerging lessons above lead to the following recommendations.

1. SSCs should be cautious of putting forward too many actions in SSAs as this may limit stakeholders’ sense of key priorities and can be difficult to manage and secure buy-in for

¹² Lessons from Abroad, SSDA Catalyst Issue 2
<http://www.ssda.org.uk/ssda/default.aspx?page=2491>

2. In developing future SSAs, SSCs must be clear about the increasing request for regional and local level data. This is probably most acute in England given the role of Regional Skills Partnerships and the changing structures of the LSC. The implications of this for data collection, presentation and resources should be carefully considered by all involved. For example, as SSAs increase in profile and affect the commissioning processes of funding partners such as LSC, there will be specific requirements for SSCs to be able to provide region and sub-sector specific information¹³
3. Both of the above issues will be assisted where stakeholders with interests in commissioning and delivery are engaged at an early stage and this contact is maintained throughout. Stakeholders are more likely to respond positively where they sense a strong element of working with the SSC to develop solutions rather than feeling these are being pushed on to them by the SSC
4. There is uncertainty amongst stakeholders at all levels about the overall progress being made in the delivery of SSAs, yet in many cases there is positive news to be told. The effectiveness of recent changes to the six monthly Self Assessment Reports (SARs) should help with this – but this needs to be monitored
5. Where progress is being made it appears to be where the action fits most readily with the stakeholder needs. Care is required that the more difficult actions, which may need more time and raise more fundamental issues are not lost. This requires to be monitored on an on-going basis. In this sense SSCs should be encouraged to report not simply on their success but also where and why it is not possible to achieve actions, for example where more complex institutional or statutory changes are required (such as Skillset's need to achieve legislative change to put the mandatory levy in place). In such instances, support may be required through SSDA.
6. A key influence on the success to date appears to have been the level of political support which was perceived to surround the development of the four Pathfinder SSAs. Two implications come from this: that a similar perception of political support may also be required for future SSA development and for generating delivery of key actions where partners are unable to agree a way forward
7. The timeline which has been developed for SSAs to be developed across the network appears to reflect potential delivery rather than key times when influence can be achieved. The development of guidance for all SSCs about the key points in the year when they should feed information to partners would help to align expectations

¹³ 'Skills Abroad' (SSDA Research Report 16, <http://www.ssda.org.uk/ssda/default.aspx?page=41>) also found the need for policy analysis and development to take into account "real differences in skill demands that occur at detailed sectoral levels"

Appendix 1 List of SSCs and Employer Coverage

Asset Skills

Asset Skills is the Sector Skills Council for property, housing, cleaning and facilities management. The sector includes:

- property managers;
- residential estate agents;
- caretakers;
- facilities management professionals;
- cleaners;
- town planners; and
- letting agents and housing managers.
- chartered surveyors; and
- social housing professionals

www.assetskills.org

Automotive Skills

Automotive Skills is the Sector Skills Council for the retail motor industry. The SSC covers the following sub-activities:

- The sector comprises:
- New vehicle sales;
- Used vehicle sales;
- Routine maintenance & repair;
- MOT inspections;
- Accident/body repair;
- Restoration/rebuilding;
- Fast fit (tyres, exhausts, batteries, etc.);
- Post-factory fitting and adaption (electricals, motability, etc.);
- Parts and accessories sales;
- Roadside rescue/recovery;
- Contract hire/operational leasing;
- 'Daily' rental (self drive or with driver); and
- Valeting/preparation.

www.automotiveskills.org.uk

Cogent

Cogent is the Sector Skills Council for chemicals and pharmaceuticals, nuclear, oil and gas, petroleum and polymers. The SSC covers five sub-sector groupings, which share a common foundation - science and technology. The groupings are:

- oil and gas extraction;
- nuclear and radiological technology;
- chemicals manufacturing;
- pharmaceuticals manufacturing;
- petroleum sector; and
- polymers.

www.cogent-ssc.com

Construction Skills

Construction Skills is the Sector Skills Council for the construction sector and covers a wide range of sectors in the development and maintenance of the built environment, including:

- house building (public and private);
- infrastructure (roads, railways and utilities);
- non-residential building in the private sector (schools and colleges, hospitals, offices);
- industrial building by the private sector (factories, warehouses); and
- commercial building by the private sector (offices, shops, entertainment, health and education).

Additionally, the sector covers maintenance and repair work in all sectors. The sector also covers the renting of construction machinery and professional and design work in consultancies (engineering, architecture and surveying).

www.constructionskills.net

Creative and Cultural Skills

Creative and Cultural Skills is the Sector Skills Council for those involved in arts, cultural heritage and craft and design. The sub-sectors covered are:

- the arts - music, performing arts, visual arts and literary arts;
- cultural heritage - museums, galleries and heritage organisations;
- craft - including designer makers of contemporary crafts, covering over 50 specialist trades and occupations; and
- design - specialist consultancies covering graphic, spatial and domestic products.

www.ccskills.org.uk

e-skills UK

e-skills UK is the Sector Skills Council for information technology and telecommunications and the lead body for contact centres on behalf of the Skills for Business Network. e-skills UK is responsible for developing the quality and quantity of professional skills of:

- the IT and Telecoms workforce;
- IT and Telecoms professionals working in all industries;
- IT users working in all industries; and
- contact centres dedicated to outsourced services, and qualifications and frameworks for contact centres operating within all industries.

www.e-skills.com

Energy and Utility Skills

Energy and Utility Skills is the Sector Skills Council for electricity and renewables, gas, waste management and water industries. It represents:

- generation, transmission and distribution of electricity, combined heat and power;
- production and distribution of gas and water; and
- removal of waste water and treatment of waste products.

These industries cover a range of fundamental services that are vital to a successful UK economy and are key to the attainment of environmental targets on water quality, fuel utilisation and waste management.

www.euskills.co.uk

Financial Services Skills Council

Financial Services Skills Council is the Sector Skills Council for the financial services sector. It includes:

- banks, building societies and central banking;
- leasing;
- credit unions, factoring and other credit granting organisations;
- investment, unit trusts and venture capital;
- life insurance, non-life insurance (general insurance) and insurance brokers;
- administration of financial markets;
- pension funding;
- financial advisers;
- unit trust and investment trust companies;
- fund managers, asset managers and pension management; and
- securities and derivatives traders.

www.fssc.org.uk

GoSkills

GoSkills is the Sector Skills Council for passenger transport, which includes:

- Aviation (airlines, airports and ground handlers);
- Bus;
- Coach;
- Taxi and Private Hire;
- Community Transport;
- Rail;
- Trams;
- Driver Training; and
- Transport Planners.

www.goskills.org

Government Skills

Government Skills is the Sector Skills Council for central government. The sector includes:

- government departments;
- executive agencies;
- non-departmental public bodies; and
- armed forces

www.government-skills.gov.uk

Improve Ltd.

Improve Ltd. is the Sector Skills Council for food and drink, which represents employers operating in all sectors of the food and drink manufacturing and processing sector. The sector includes:

- sea fishing;
- craft bakery;
- meat and poultry;
- dairy; and
- general food and drink.

www.improveltd.co.uk

Lantra

Lantra is the Sector Skills Council for the environmental and land-based sector. This includes:

- agricultural livestock and crops;
- animal care;
- animal technology;
- aquaculture;
- environmental conservation;
- equine;
- farriery;
- fencing;
- fisheries management;
- floristry;
- game conservation;
- land-based engineering;
- landscape;
- productive horticulture; and
- trees and timber
- veterinary nursing.

www.lantra.co.uk

Lifelong Learning UK

Lifelong Learning UK is the Sector Skills Council for community based learning and development, further education, higher education, library and information services and work-based learning.

www.lifelonglearninguk.org

People 1st

People 1st is the Sector Skills Council for the hospitality, leisure, travel and tourism sector, representing employers of all sizes in the following industries:

- hotels;
- pubs, bars and nightclubs;
- membership clubs;
- gambling;
- tourist services;
- youth hostels;
- self-catering accommodation;
- restaurants;
- contract food service providers;
- events;
- travel services;
- visitor attractions;

- holiday parks; and
- hospitality services.

www.people1st.co.uk

Proskills

Proskills is the Sector Skills Council for the process and manufacturing sector. The sector includes:

- coatings;
- extractives;
- glass manufacture and glazing;
- building products and refractories;
- printing and printed packaging.

www.proskills.co.uk

SEMTA

SEMTA is the Sector Skills Council for science, engineering and manufacturing technologies and represents the sectors of:

- aerospace;
- electrical engineering;
- electronics, including semi-conductors;
- mechanical engineering and metal trades;
- motor vehicles;
- shipbuilding;
- packaging;
- pharmacy and parts of the pharmaceutical industry;
- biotechnology;
- genetics;
- nanotechnology;
- mathematics; and
- forensic science
- meteorology.

www.semta.org.uk

Skillfast-UK

Skillfast-UK is the Sector Skills Council for apparel, footwear, textiles and related businesses. Its remit covers a wide variety of activities, including:

- production of raw materials e.g. leather production;
- manufacture of apparel, footwear, textiles and fibres;
- servicing of apparel, footwear and textile products e.g. dry cleaning and shoe repair;
- design activities related to apparel, footwear and textiles; and
- trading in apparel, footwear and textile products, including specialist wholesale activities and activities of brand-driven holding companies.

www.skillfast-uk.org

Skills for Care and Development

Skills for Care and Development is the Sector Skills Council for social care, children and young people. Social care policy is fully devolved to each of the four countries. The scope of the sector is defined by legislation in each of the countries, with some differences for the devolved administrations. The current scope of the sector is:

- children's homes;
- care homes;
- domiciliary care and support agencies;
- day centres and services;
- social work;
- fostering agencies and services, and foster carers;
- nurse agencies; and
- adoption services.

www.skillsforcareanddevelopment.org.uk

Skills for Health

Skills for Health is the Sector Skills Council that represents the whole of the UK health sector – National Health Services, independent healthcare and voluntary & community organisations.

www.skillsforhealth.org.uk

Skills for Justice

Skills for Justice is the Sector Skills Council for custodial care, community justice and police, in public, private and voluntary organisations.

www.skillsforjustice.com

Skills for Logistics

Skills for Logistics is the Sector Skills Council for the logistics sector. The sector covers:

- freight transport by road;
- storage and warehousing;
- activities of other transport agencies;
- courier services;
- airfreight;
- rail freight;
- freight inland; and
- sea and coastal water transport

www.skillsforlogistics.org

SkillsActive

SkillsActive is the Sector Skills Council for active leisure and learning. The sector covers:

- sport and recreation;
- health and fitness;
- the outdoors
- playwork
- the caravan industry

www.skillsactive.com

Skillset

Skillset is the Sector Skills Council for the audio-visual industries. The sector covers:

- broadcast;
- film;
- video;
- interactive media; and
- photo imaging.

www.skillset.org

Skillsmart Retail

Skillsmart Retail is the Sector Skills Council for the retail sector, established in 2002 and includes:

- supermarkets, department stores and corner shops;
- specialist food, drink and tobacco stores;
- specialist retailers of goods including textiles, clothing, footwear and leather, furniture, electrical, hardware, books and stationery, floor coverings and photographic equipment;
- antique retailers; and
- markets and mail order.

www.skillsmartretail.com

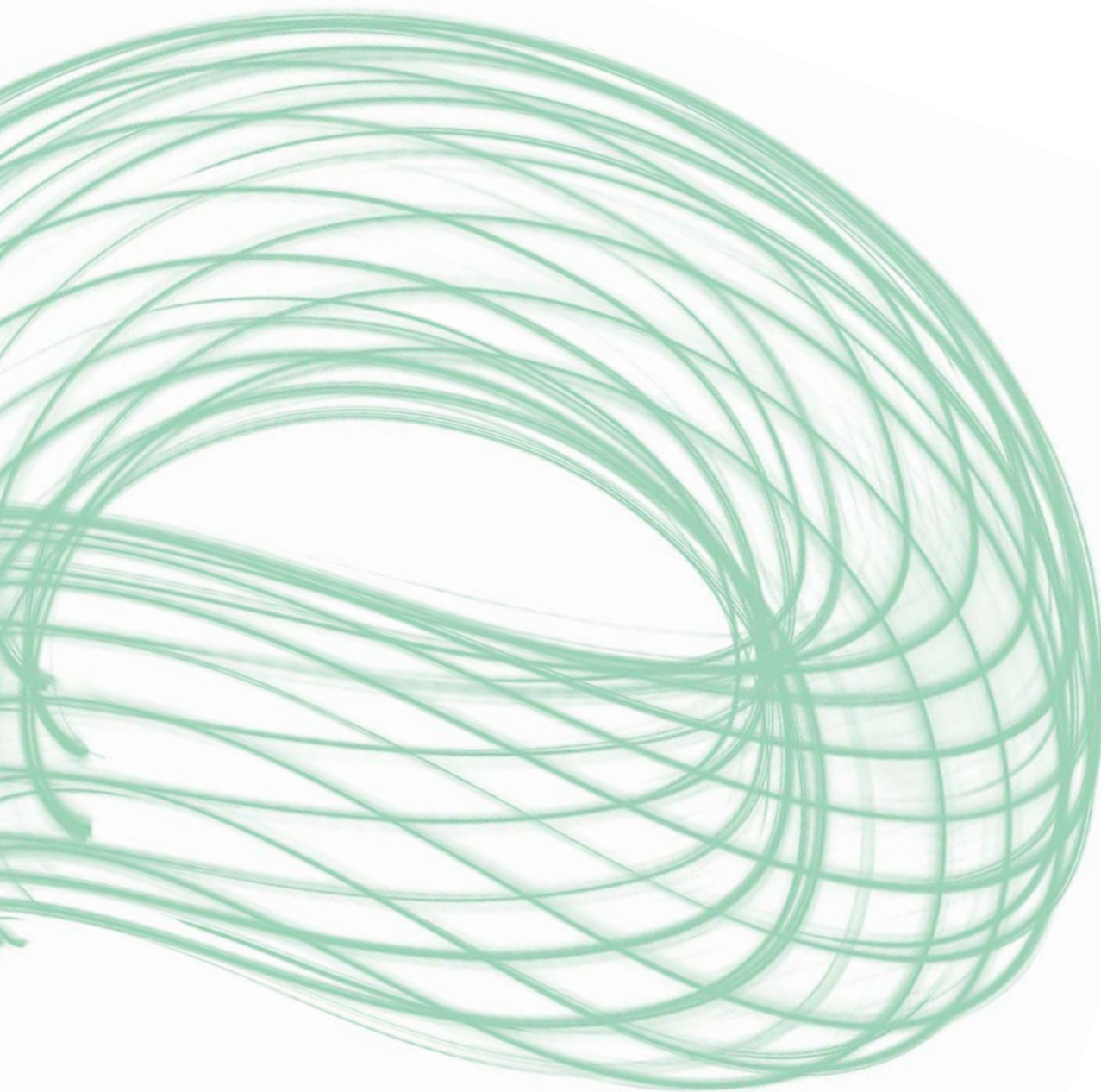
SummitSkills

SummitSkills is the Sector Skills Council for the building services engineering sector.

The sector covers:

- design, installation and maintenance of electrotechnical, heating, ventilation, air conditioning, refrigeration and plumbing; and
- oil and gas fitting design, installation and maintenance.

www.summitskills.org.uk



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