

Employment and skills provision survey 2021

February 2022



REPORT OF THE EMPLOYMENT AND SKILLS PROVISION SURVEY 2021

INTRODUCTION

The survey was conducted by the Local Government Association's Research and Information team in July-August 2021 in order that a forthcoming refresh of the LGA's Work Local proposals be better informed by local authorities' views of the effectiveness of the current system.

The survey was sent to all 333 local authorities in England. The response rate was 19 per cent, as shown in the table below:

Type of authority	Number of respondents	Response rate
	Number	Per cent
Counties	8	33%
London boroughs	8	24%
Metropolitan districts	7	19%
Shire districts	33	18%
Unitaries	8	14%
Total	64	19%

Because of the level of response, the figures should be treated as a snapshot of the situation in those authorities which responded rather than as necessarily being representative of local authorities as a whole.

SUMMARY

The main findings are as follows:

- 69 per cent of respondents thought that two main issues affecting local recovery were a mismatch between the supply and demand of skills, and ensuring effective skills provision for future growth sectors;
- 64 per cent of respondents thought that Employer Representative Bodies were either moderately prepared (33 per cent) or not very prepared (31 per cent) to set out the skills needs of all local employers;
- 76 per of respondents thought that the Government's Skills for Jobs White Paper FE reforms would either be fairly effective (33 per cent) or not very effective (43 per cent);
- Local FE colleges were most likely to be regarded as having engaged with councils to understand local needs in provision, while the Education and Skills Funding Agency and National Apprenticeship Service were least likely. The same was true of engagement during delivery of skills and employment provision, and a similar picture emerged for willingness to share data;
- 70 per cent of respondents thought that their council's convening role around employment and skills had increased during the COVID-19 pandemic (46 per cent thought it had greatly increased);
- 75 per cent of respondents thought that the pandemic had led their council to either developing or being involved in developing programmes to help sectors experiencing recruitment and retention difficulties;
- 90 per cent of respondents reported that their council was working with partners to ensure a coordinated approach to recovery either to a great extent or moderate extent;
- 75 per cent of respondents thought that national initiatives were aligned so as to provide clear pathways to further learning or work either to a moderate or small extent;
- 89 per cent of respondents thought that local providers were moderately well equipped or equipped to a small extent to support opportunities needed by local businesses and residents;
- 62 per cent of respondents expected the transition from the European Social Fund to UK Shared Prosperity Fund to affect local provision either to a great or moderate extent;
- 97 per cent of respondent councils had engaged with the Kickstart Scheme since September 2020;
- 82 per cent of respondents thought that support in navigating national programmes met the needs of local employers either to moderate or small extent;
- 93 per cent of respondents either strongly or moderately agreed that employers would value a one-stop shop service for local skills and employment.

RESULTS

Main labour market and skills issues

The two main issues relating to local recovery, both cited by 69 per cent of respondents, were the mismatch between the supply and demand of skills, and ensuring effective skills provision for future growth sectors. The next most common was youth unemployment and high NEET¹ rates (31 per cent).

What, in your opinion, are the main labour market and skills issues relating to recovery in your area?		
	Number	%
Mismatch between the supply and demand of skills	42	69%
Ensuring there is effective skills provision for future growth sectors	42	69%
Youth unemployment and high NEET rates	19	31%
Supporting people to improve qualifications	16	26%
Too many people out of work but not seeking employment	13	21%
Lack of an effective careers, advice and guidance offer	12	20%
Lack of, or poor, coordination of employment and training activity	11	18%
Supporting the over-50s back into work	8	13%
People leaving the area due to lack of job opportunities	6	10%
Other	8	13%
Total	61	100%

Note: respondents could choose up to three items.

A third of respondents (33 per cent) thought that Employer Representative Bodies were moderately well prepared to set out local skills needs for all employers, a similar proportion (31 per cent) thought they were not very prepared, and 11 per cent thought they were not at all prepared. Around a quarter (23 per cent) could not say.

Thinking about the Government's proposals for Employer Representative Bodies (ERBs), such as Chambers of Commerce, how well prepared do you think your ERB is to set out the skills needs of employers of all sizes and sectors in your area?		
	Number	%
Fully prepared	1	2%
Moderately prepared	20	33%
Not very prepared	19	31%
Not at all prepared	7	11%
Don't know	14	23%
Total	61	100%

Half of respondents thought that the Government's Skills for Jobs White Paper further education reforms would be either not very effective (43 per cent) or not at all effective (7 per cent) at upskilling people with qualifications at level 2 or below. Just over a third thought it would be either fairly effective (33 per cent) or very effective (2 per cent).

¹ Not in education, employment or training.

How effective, if at all, do you think the Government's Skills for Jobs White Paper further education reforms will be at upskilling people with qualifications at level 2 or below?		
	Number	%
Very effective	1	2%
Fairly effective	20	33%
Not very effective	26	43%
Not at all effective	4	7%
Don't know	10	16%
Total	61	100%

In terms of engagement with councils to understand and embed local skills and employment needs in their local provision, the two agencies most commonly cited as having done this to a great extent were local FE colleges (48 per cent) and Jobcentre Plus (39 per cent). For most agencies, between a third and a half answered 'moderate' or 'small' extent while more than a half (52 per cent) thought that the Education and Skills Funding Agency had not engaged at all, and 40 per cent thought the same of the National Apprenticeship Service.

To what extent have the following organisations engaged with your council to understand and embed local skills and employment needs within the provision they are developing for your area?								
	Great extent		Moderate extent		Small extent		Not at all	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Careers and Enterprise Company	11	21%	14	27%	17	33%	10	19%
Department for Work and Pensions	14	24%	24	41%	17	29%	4	7%
Education and Skills Funding Agency	5	9%	5	9%	16	30%	28	52%
Employment support providers	11	20%	29	53%	13	24%	2	4%
Independent training providers	6	10%	27	46%	23	39%	3	5%
Jobcentre Plus	23	39%	21	36%	14	24%	1	2%
National Apprenticeship Service	3	5%	11	20%	19	35%	22	40%
National Careers Service	10	19%	11	20%	18	33%	15	28%
Local further education colleges	29	48%	18	30%	10	17%	3	5%

Base: 61 authorities. (The number of respondents answering 'don't know' ranged from 1 to 9.)

Turning to engagement during delivery of skills and employment provision to meet local need, a similar picture emerged. Local FE colleges were most likely to be regarded as having engaged to a great extent (49 per cent), while the Education and Skills Funding Agency (54 per cent) and National Apprenticeship Service (47 per cent) were most likely to be regarded as not having engaged at all.

To what extent have the following organisations continued to engage with your council during delivery of skills and employment provision to ensure it meets local needs, including by adapting provision?

	Great extent		Moderate extent		Small extent		Not at all	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Careers and Enterprise Company	11	22%	11	22%	12	24%	15	31%
Department for Work and Pensions	13	24%	15	27%	20	36%	7	13%
Education and Skills Funding Agency	3	6%	5	9%	17	31%	29	54%
Employment support providers	10	18%	20	36%	17	30%	9	16%
Independent training providers	5	8%	22	37%	21	36%	11	19%
Jobcentre Plus	17	29%	22	38%	17	29%	2	3%
National Apprenticeship Service	2	4%	8	15%	18	34%	25	47%
National Careers Service	7	13%	14	26%	14	26%	18	34%
Local further education colleges	29	49%	13	22%	13	22%	4	7%

Base: 60 authorities. (The number of respondents answering 'don't know' ranged from 1 to 11.)

Minorities of respondents agreed that organisations had been willing to share data about how provision was working. The highest proportion answering 'great extent' was for local FE colleges (27 per cent). For the National Apprenticeship Service (53 per cent), Education and Skills Funding Agency (51 per cent) and National Careers Service (45 per cent), respondents were more likely to reply 'not at all' than any other option.

To what extent have the following organisations been willing to share data about how their provision is working in your local area through scrutiny committees or employment and skills boards?

	Great extent		Moderate extent		Small extent		Not at all	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Careers and Enterprise Company	9	22%	7	17%	9	22%	16	39%
Department for Work and Pensions	7	14%	12	24%	17	35%	13	27%
Education and Skills Funding Agency	1	3%	7	18%	11	28%	20	51%
Employment support providers	5	11%	16	35%	16	35%	9	20%
Independent training providers	1	2%	10	21%	20	43%	16	34%
Jobcentre Plus	7	14%	21	42%	14	28%	8	16%
National Apprenticeship Service	1	3%	7	18%	10	26%	20	53%
National Careers Service	3	8%	6	16%	12	32%	17	45%
Local further education colleges	14	27%	16	31%	14	27%	7	14%

Base: 57 authorities. (The number of respondents answering 'don't know' ranged from 6 to 18.)

Around a half of respondents tended to agree that current careers guidance was delivered in a timely manner (48 per cent), considered local employment (49 per cent), works with a wide demographic (49 per cent), and has shown flexibility (50 per cent). In each case, between a quarter and a third tended to disagree and less than a fifth strongly agreed.

To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements about the current quality of careers advice and guidance delivered in your area?

	Strongly agree		Tend to agree		Tend to disagree		Strongly disagree	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Delivered in a timely manner	7	15%	22	48%	14	30%	3	7%
Considers local employment and sectors	9	18%	25	49%	13	25%	4	8%
Works with a wide demographic	8	16%	24	49%	14	29%	3	6%
Has shown flexibility around local need and changes in the labour market	7	15%	23	50%	13	28%	3	7%

Base: 58 authorities. (The number of respondents answering 'don't know' ranged from 7 to 12.)

Around a half of respondents (46 per cent) thought that the council's convening role around employment and skills had greatly increased during the COVID-19 pandemic, 24 per cent thought that it had slightly increased, and 20 per cent that it had remained broadly unchanged.

How has your council's convening role around employment and skills changed during the COVID-19 pandemic?		
	Number	%
Greatly increased	27	46%
Slightly increased	14	24%
Remained broadly unchanged	12	20%
Slightly reduced	4	7%
Greatly reduced	0	0%
Don't know	2	3%
Total	59	100%

Three-quarters of respondents (75 per cent) reported that the pandemic had led to the council developing, or being involved in developing, programmes to support specific sectors experiencing difficulties recruiting or retaining staff.

Has the pandemic led to your council developing, or being involved in developing, programmes/projects to support specific sectors experiencing difficulties finding or retaining staff?		
	Number	%
Yes	44	75%
No	12	20%
Don't know	3	5%
Total	59	100%

Just over a half of respondents (53 per cent) reported that the council was working with partners to ensure a coordinated response to jobs and skill recovery to a great extent, and most of the rest (37 per cent) replied to 'a moderate extent'.

To what extent is your council working with local and national partners to ensure there is a coordinated approach to jobs and skills recovery?		
	Number	%
A great extent	31	53%
A moderate extent	22	37%
A small extent	5	8%
Not at all	0	0%
Don't know	1	2%
Total	59	100%

Respondents tended to be equivocal about the extent to which national initiatives were aligned so as to provide clear pathways to further learning and work – 39 per cent answered that they did this to a ‘moderate’ extent and 36 per cent to a ‘small’ extent.

To what extent are national initiatives to support young people or adults aligned so as to provide clear pathways to further learning and work?		
	Number	%
A great extent	2	3%
A moderate extent	23	39%
A small extent	21	36%
Not at all	3	5%
Don't know	10	17%
Total	59	100%

A similar picture emerged when it came to assessing of how adequately equipped local training providers were to support local skills and growth opportunities – in terms of businesses’ needs, 89 per cent replied a ‘moderate’ extent (49 per cent) or a ‘small’ extent (40 per cent), while for residents’ needs the respective proportions were 89 per cent, 58 per cent and 31 per cent.

To what extent do you feel that your local training provider base is adequately equipped to support the skills and growth opportunities needed by local businesses and by local residents?								
	A great extent		A moderate extent		A small extent		Not at all	
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
Businesses	5	10%	27	49%	22	40%	1	2%
Residents	5	10%	32	58%	17	31%	1	2%

Base: 60 authorities. (The number of respondents answering ‘don’t know’ was 5.)

Just over a third of respondents (37 per cent) thought that the transition from the European Social Fund to the UK Shared Prosperity Fund would affect local employment and skills provision to a great extent, while 25 per cent thought it would be affected to a moderate extent. Note that 27 per cent were unable to say.

To what extent do you think that the transition from the European Social Fund to the UK Shared Prosperity Fund will affect your local employment and skills provision?		
	Number	%
A great extent	22	37%
A moderate extent	15	25%
A small extent	4	7%
Not at all	2	3%
Don't know	16	27%
Total	59	100%

Almost all respondents (97 per cent) had engaged with the Kickstart Scheme since September 2020, most commonly by creating internal placements (68 per cent), supporting DWP with local roll-outs (66 per cent), working with local groups to support young people (59 per cent), and by becoming a Gateway organisation (34 per cent).

How, if at all, has your council engaged with the Kickstart Scheme since September 2020?		
	Number	%
Created placements internally	40	68%
Supported DWP with roll-out locally	39	66%
Worked with local groups to support young people's transition to Kickstart	35	59%
Became a Gateway organisation	20	34%
We have not engaged since September 2020	2	3%
Don't know	2	3%
Total	59	100%

Almost four out of five respondents (82 per cent) thought that support in navigating the range of national programmes met the needs of local employers either to a moderate extent (36 per cent) or small extent (46 per cent).

To what extent do you think that support in navigating the range of national employment and skills programmes (e.g. Kickstart, traineeships, apprenticeships) meets the needs of local employers?		
	Number	%
A great extent	6	10%
A moderate extent	21	36%
A small extent	27	46%
Not at all	2	3%
Don't know	3	5%
Total	59	100%

More than two-thirds of respondents (69 per cent) strongly agreed that employers would value a local one-stop shop service for skills and employment, and most of the remainder (24 per cent) moderately agreed.

To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement?		
<i>Employers would value a one-stop shop service for skills and employment in our local area</i>		
	Number	%
Strongly agree	41	69%
Moderately agree	14	24%
Moderately disagree	1	2%
Strongly disagree	0	0%
Don't know	3	5%
Total	59	100%



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