



Perceptions of Vocational and Technical Qualifications

Final report

September 2018



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Glossary of terms

Apprenticeship framework	These are developed by sector bodies, primarily focused on qualifications. They are being phased out to be replaced by apprenticeship standards. Apprenticeships are assessed throughout by completing a unit at a time but there is no end point assessment.
Apprenticeship standard	New apprenticeship standards, developed by employers, to show what an apprentice will be doing and the skills required of them, by job role. Standards are developed by employer groups known as ‘trailblazers’. These are occupation-focused rather than qualification-led, with the apprentice being assessed at the end (end point assessment).
Awarding organisation	An organisation recognised by the qualifications regulators in England, Wales or Northern Ireland to develop, deliver and award qualifications.
Employer provider (subset of employer respondent group)	Delivers some, or all, of the off-the-job training element of an apprenticeship to their own staff, or to other employers’ staff, as well as their own staff.
End point assessment of apprenticeship	The final assessment for an apprenticeship, taken at the end of the apprentices training and used to determine whether they are occupationally competent and will pass their apprenticeship.
Functional Skills qualifications	Functional Skills qualifications are available in English, maths and ICT and are available in levels from Entry 1 to Level 2. Functional Skills assessments test the fundamental, applied skills in these subjects which help people gain the most from life, learning and work.
Other Vocational & Technical Qualifications	These normally have a vocational focus, and for this report refer to qualifications other than FSQs and EPAs. These mostly refer to National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs), although these are not the only types that were referred to.
Trailblazer group	Trailblazers are groups of employers that come together as the creators and early adopters of new apprenticeship standards. Focused on the specific knowledge, skills and behaviours for their sector, they work together, supported and guided by the Institute, to develop new programmes of learning that will directly impact their workforce. The trailblazer membership covers a wide range of employers (at least 10).

Executive summary

Introduction

Ofqual is the independent qualifications regulator for England, responsible for regulating around 150 awarding organisations who provide over 17,000 live qualifications for learners. Ofqual regulates general qualifications such as GCSEs, A levels and AS levels, but also a wide range of other qualifications – and it is these qualifications that were asked about in this research. This includes Functional Skills Qualifications (FSQs) and apprenticeship End-Point Assessments (EPAs) which were asked about specifically, but also a wide range of other Vocational and Technical Qualifications (VTQs). This report presents the findings from the survey, and should be read alongside the technical annex.

This project was commissioned by Ofqual and conducted by Pye Tait Consulting. A pilot survey took place in 2017 and focused on employers only. Due to the changes to the employer survey between the pilot and this work, comparisons have not been made. In addition, learner and training provider surveys have also been included to ensure a balance of opinion and to understand how views are reflected through the entire system of education and training. It should be noted that some questions were not asked of all three respondent groups, where only relevant to one or two groups. For example, only employers were asked questions about their use of qualifications for recruitment and training.

This survey of perceptions provides a snapshot of attitudes towards Functional Skills Qualifications in English and maths, apprenticeship End-Point Assessments and other Vocational and Technical Qualifications. Ofqual has an interest in stakeholder views both from the perspective of a regulator of those qualifications, some of which are currently subject to reform, and as an External Quality Assurance provider of some End-Point Assessments. The aim of this project was to understand how stakeholders (employers, colleges and training providers) view and use these qualifications.

The survey followed a telephone and/or online method dependent on the respondent group and availability. Three separate surveys with the three respondent groups were conducted. 2070 employers, 532 training providers and 604 learners were surveyed.

The fieldwork with employers was conducted between October 2017 and January 2018. The survey sought to interview individuals with insight into and/or responsibility for training and qualifications, such as HR or Recruitment Managers, Operations Managers and (in smaller businesses) Managing Directors. Nearly half the respondents had an HR, training or recruitment role, and the remainder were senior business directors, managers or owners.

Fieldwork with training providers and learners was conducted between December 2017 and February 2018. The final achieved samples were structured to be representative of employers and

training providers whereas the learner sample was an opportunity sample. Further information on sampling and methodology is available in the accompanying technical annex.

This report focuses on the key findings and conclusions, with statistically significant differences between respondent groups noted where relevant.

Findings

Overview of perceptions across employers, training providers and learners

1. It is important to recognise that employer, training provider and learner perceptions of qualifications have been sought at a time of great flux within the educational landscape, which respondents say contributes to a general sense of uncertainty and lack of clarity/understanding about qualifications and assessments.
2. Functional Skills and other Vocational and Technical Qualifications are predominantly viewed positively by employers, training providers and learners.

Perceptions of employers

3. Overall, employer perceptions of FSQs and other VTQs are largely positive. When combining those that strongly agree/agree:
 - **72%** of employers value Functional Skills Qualifications (FSQs);
 - **91%** of employers value other VTQs;
 - **83%** of employers think other VTQs prepare learners well for the workplace;
 - **87%** of employers think the purpose of other VTQs are well-understood;
 - **82%** of employers think other VTQs equip learners with relevant technical skills; and
 - **78%** of employers consider a relevant VTQ to be essential when recruiting for skilled and supervisory roles within their organisations.
4. Employer organisation size is a key factor influencing the level of understanding of qualifications and assessments, and the likelihood of holding positive perceptions. Large organisations (based on number of employees and number of registered learners) are more likely to have a good understanding and hold positive perceptions, than small/micro organisations¹.
5. Organisations more committed to training (for example they are an employer provider or have offered training to their staff in the last year) are also more likely to have a good understanding and hold positive perceptions of qualifications and assessments, compared

¹ Large – over 249 employees; Medium – 50-249 employees; Small – 10-49 employees; Micro – 0-9 employees

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with organisations which had not offered training in the last twelve months at the time fieldwork was conducted.

6. Unsurprisingly, given the low numbers of respondents that would have had exposure to End-Point Assessments (EPAs) at the time the survey was conducted, a minority (18%) of employers report a very good or good understanding of EPAs.
7. Other VTQs are significantly more likely to be viewed positively when part of an apprenticeship, rather than as a standalone qualification.

Perceptions of training providers

8. A higher proportion of training providers with more than 2000 registered learners value FSQs (82%) compared with training providers with fewer than 100 learners (66%).
9. Training providers are more likely to have negative perceptions of EPAs, compared with employers and learners (14% of training providers disagree when asked if they value EPAs (compared with 5% of employers and 3% of learners saying the same), saying that one final assessment is off-putting to learners and can result in more failures (if the learner has a “bad day” but is otherwise capable of passing). It should be taken into consideration that a significantly higher proportion of training providers have a very good or quite good understanding of EPAs (56%) compared with employers (18%).
10. Nearly 70% of training providers say they understand the difference between apprenticeship frameworks and standards, compared with 20% of employers who say the same.
11. A fifth of training providers disagree when asked if learners and parents understand the purpose of EPAs – but it should be noted that learner views do not support this, with only 5% of learners who disagree.

Perceptions of learners

12. Of the learners asked why they chose to take the qualifications/assessments in scope of this research:
 - **40% took FSQs** because they thought they would improve their English, maths or ICT skills;
 - **53% took other VTQs** to improve their skills; and
 - **47% took an apprenticeship** to learn skills on the job.
13. Over half of the learners surveyed expected that taking FSQs would help to improve their English or maths skills. 46% of learners anticipate that achieving other VTQs will help their

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vocational and technical skills to improve, and 47% expect this will help them become more confident in using their vocational and technical skills.

14. Learners with prior experience of the workplace are significantly more likely to have positive perceptions of other VTQs than learners with no work experience.

15. The majority (65%) of learners report a very good or good understanding of EPAs.

Perceptions – baseline drawn from average across all three respondent groups

The table overleaf shows an overview of respondent agreement to positive perceptions. When all three respondent groups (employers, training providers and learners) or two respondent groups (eg employers and learners) were asked about their level of agreement to the same statement, averages have been used. These averages have been based on combining the number of respondents that have strongly agreed and agreed or the number of respondents that have strongly disagreed and disagreed. N/A denotes that the question was not applicable to that particular respondent group.

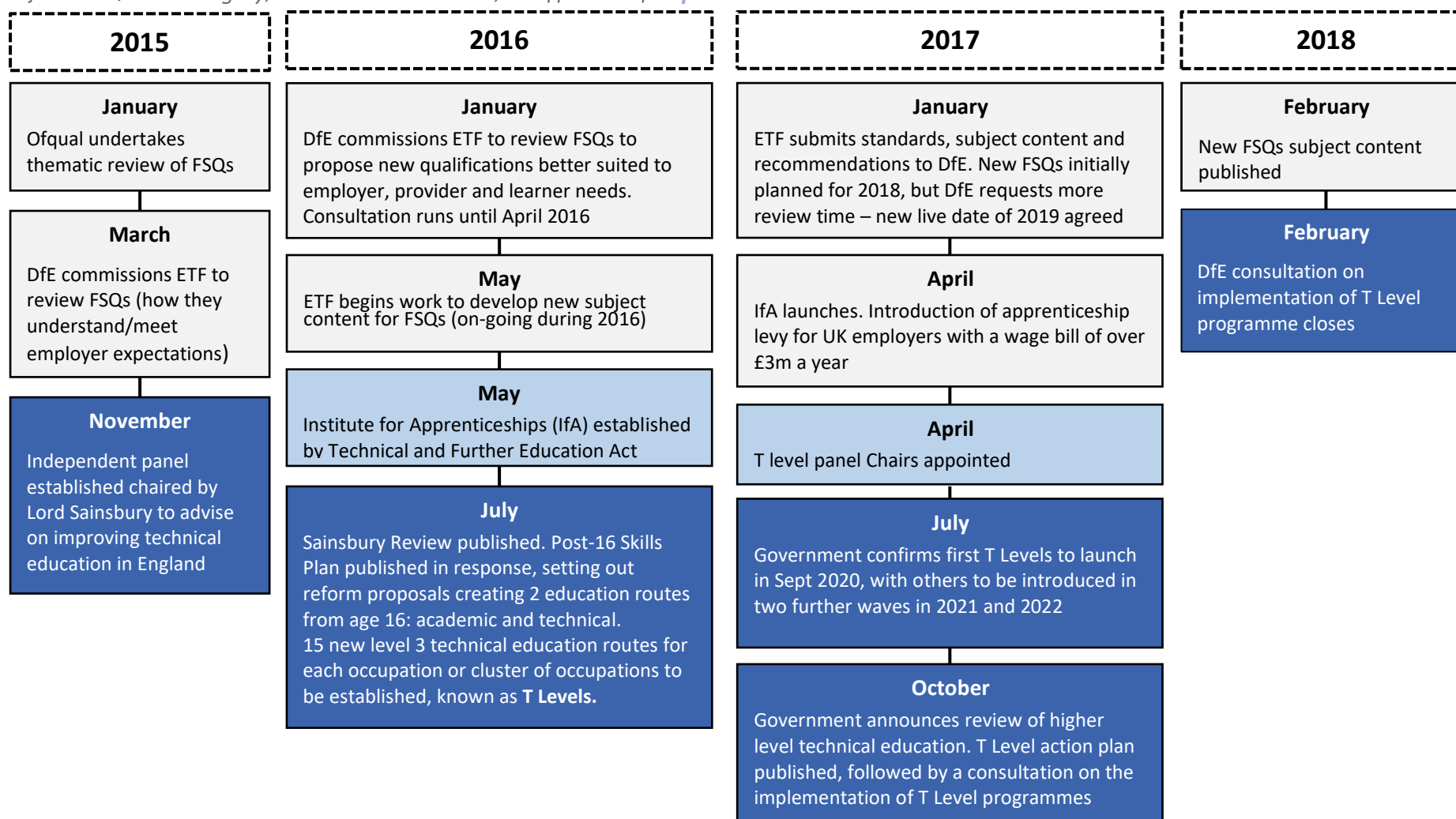
Perception	FSQs	Other VTQs	EPAs
We have a very or quite good understanding of FSQs (employer only)/other VTQs (employer only)/EPAs	34%	45%	47%
We value FSQs/other VTQs/EPAs	75%	88%	51%
People holding FSQs have the appropriate level of skill in English needed	62%	N/A	N/A
People holding FSQs have the appropriate level of skill in Maths needed	60%	N/A	N/A
People holding FSQs have the appropriate level of skill in ICT needed	55%	N/A	N/A
The purpose of other VTQs is well-understood by employers	N/A	73%	N/A
The purpose of other VTQs is well-understood by learners and parents (training providers and learners only)	N/A	66%	N/A
People achieving other VTQs/passing EPAs have technical skills needed by employers (employers only)	N/A	82%	65%
Availability of FSQ courses & assessment/of other VTQs/of EPAs is sufficiently flexible (employers and learners only)	54%	70%	60%
FSQs/other VTQs are good preparation for further study (training providers and learners only)	70%	79%	N/A
Other VTQs prepare learners well for the workplace	N/A	80%	N/A
I am confident that EPAs measure the skills and knowledge employers want them to (employers and training providers only)	N/A	N/A	44%
Learners understand the purpose of EPAs (training providers and learners only)	N/A	N/A	49%

1. Education and policy landscape

1.1 Changes in the education and policy landscape

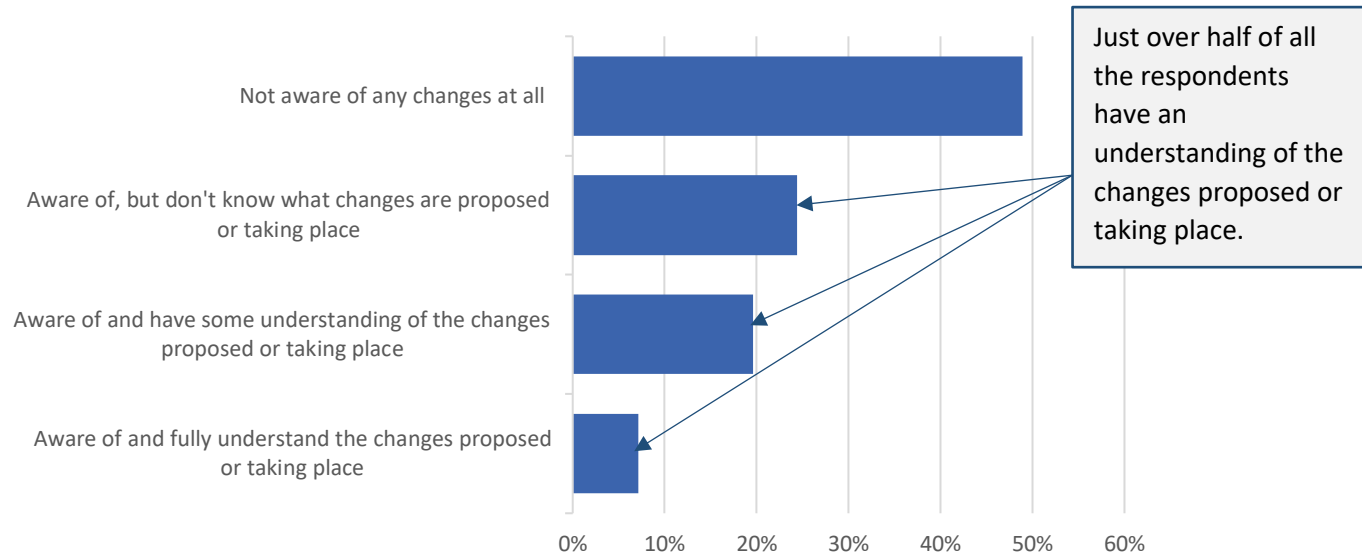
Figure 1: Timeline of reforms to the education system, 2015 – Spring 2018

Reform to FSQs is shown in *grey*, technical education in *blue*, and apprenticeships in *pale blue*.



1.2 Respondents' understanding of the changes

Figure 2: Employer awareness and understanding of changes to other Vocational and Technical Qualifications



Base: 1219

- A higher proportion of large employers (18%) fully understand the changes, compared with 4% of micro businesses.

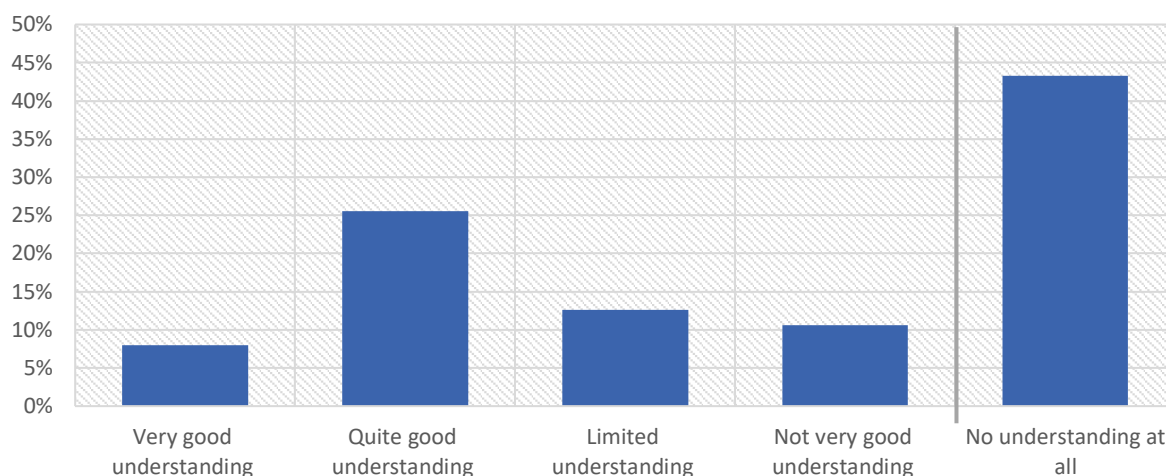
2. Perceptions of Functional Skills Qualifications

2.1 Key findings – Functional Skills Qualifications

- Functional Skills Qualifications (FSQs) are predominantly viewed positively by employers, training providers and learners
- Nearly three-quarters of employers (72%) say they value FSQs
- Level of knowledge of FSQs increases with organisation size, with large businesses significantly more likely than micro businesses to have a very good or quite good understanding of them
- Employers in the real estate and professional, scientific and technical sectors have the lowest level of understanding of FSQs compared with other sectors – which is likely to reflect how commonly they are used in these industries
- Employers have a limited awareness of FSQ brands (eg offered by different Awarding Organisations), or why they were chosen, and do not appear to question what brands are typically used in their organisations
- Organisation size (by number of employees and number of registered learners) is associated with perceptions. Large businesses and training providers with 2000+ learners are significantly more likely to have positive perceptions of FSQs than micro businesses and training providers with fewer than 100 learners
- Employer providers are significantly more likely than other employers, to have a very/quite good understanding of FSQs, and to hold positive perceptions about them
- FSQs are valued by employers because of their relevance, ability to meet business needs and provide assurance of competence. Learners expect that studying towards FSQs will help improve their English and maths skills, and confidence in using these skills
- Few employers (4%) disagreed when asked if they value FSQs – those that disagree say they are not relevant for their business or are too generic in relation to specific jobs

2.2 Understanding of Functional Skills Qualifications

Figure 3: Employer understanding of Functional Skills Qualifications (FSQs)



Base: 2070²

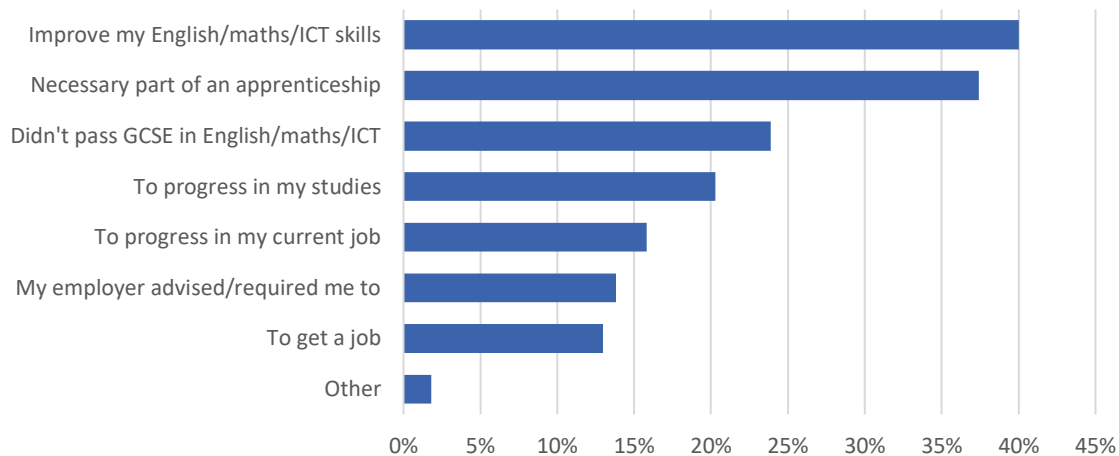
- The level of understanding of FSQs increases with organisation size.
- Over 60% of medium and large employers report a very good or quite good understanding³, compared with 48% of small and 22% of micro employers.
- Understanding of FSQs is lower among employers in the real estate and professional, scientific and technical sectors (7% and 15% with a very good or quite good understanding, respectively).
- Understanding is highest in the education sector (70% of respondents with a very good or quite good understanding).
- Understanding is higher among employer providers (74% have a very good or quite good understanding, compared with 29% of respondents who are not employer providers).

² The total base number of respondents was 2070. The respondents that had no understanding at all was 897, meaning these respondents did not answer further questions related to functional skills and the new base was 1173.

³ In the text, when 'very good' and 'quite good understanding' have been referred to alongside one another, the percentages to each of these responses has been combined

2.3 Why learners chose Functional Skills Qualifications

Figure 4: Learner views on why they chose to take Functional Skills Qualifications (FSQs)



**Respondents could select more than one response*

Base: 385

- A slightly higher proportion of learners opted for FSQs as they wanted to improve their skills if they had prior experience of work (24%) compared with 16% with no work experience.

2.4 Perceptions of Functional Skills Qualifications

2.4.1 Functional Skills Qualifications 'brands'

Employer respondents were asked to identify the different 'brands' they use when opting for FSQs – ie the awarding organisation or examination board. The vast majority of employers either did not know, or confused a National Vocational Qualification (NVQ) with FSQs. The brands typically cited were City & Guilds and Pearson.

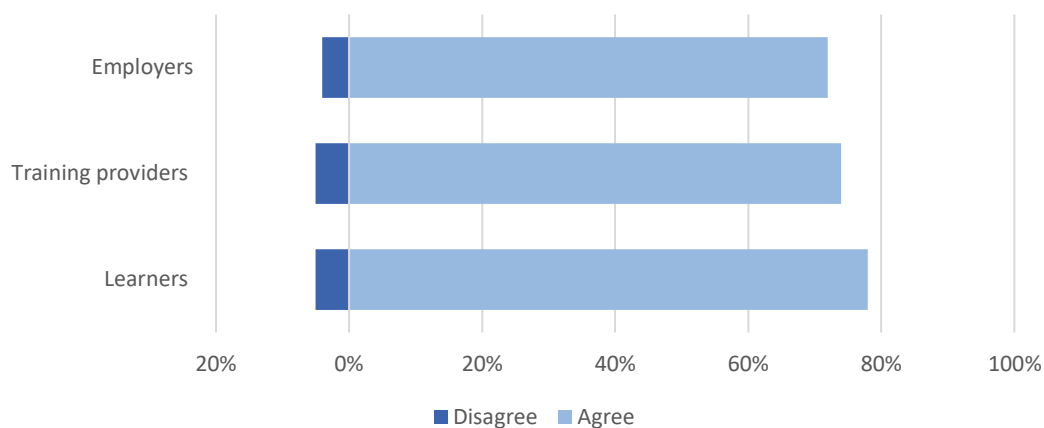
Around a fifth of employers did not know why these particular brands were chosen. Just over two-thirds of employers said these brands are chosen because they have the most relevance – either for job role, the organisation or the industry. The remainder said they believed that these brands have always been used.

2.4.2 Perceptions of Functional Skills Qualifications

Employers, training providers and learners were asked to rate their level of agreement with a series of statements about FSQs. The statements varied slightly depending on respondent group – hence not all questions were asked of all three groups, or wording was adapted accordingly⁴.

Figures 5 to 10 present these perceptions⁵.

Figure 5: Responses to “We value Functional Skills Qualifications (FSQs)”



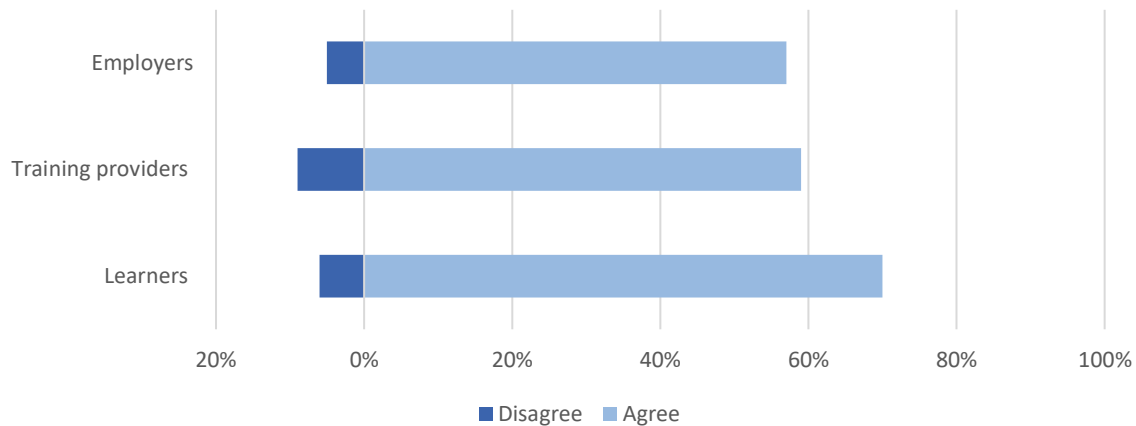
Base: employers (953), training providers (529), learners (603)

- A higher proportion of large employers agree (84%) compared with micro employers (64%).
- 92% of employer providers agree compared with 72% of all employers.
- 82% of training providers with 2000+ learners agree, compared with 66% with fewer than 100 learners.

⁴ See the Technical Annex for questionnaires showing how wording was adapted by respondent group

⁵ Figures show aggregations of strongly agree/agree and disagree/strongly disagree. Responses of neither agree or disagree, don't know, or prefer not to say, are not shown hence bars will not total 100%

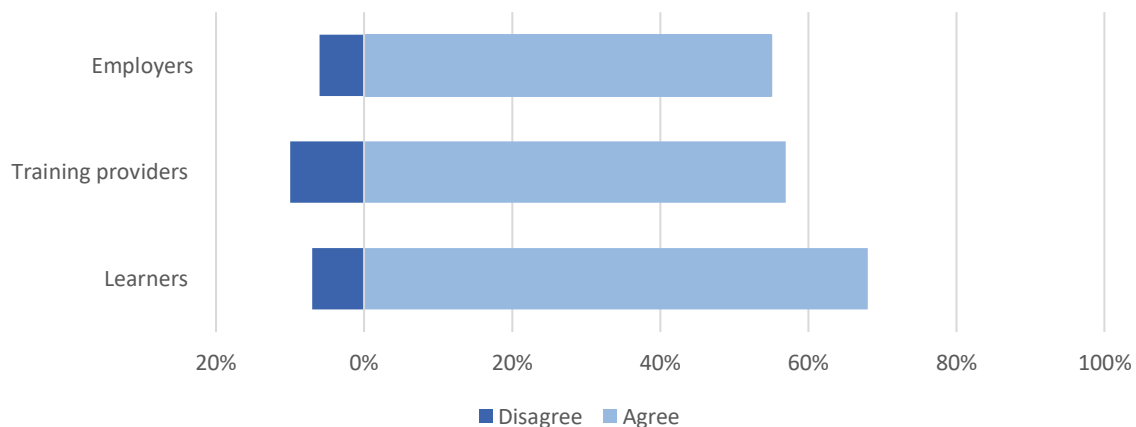
Figure 6: Responses to “People holding Functional Skills Qualifications (FSQs) have the appropriate level of skill in English needed”



Base: employers (1173), training providers (527), learners (600)

- A higher proportion of large employers agree (67%) compared with micro employers (48%).
- 74% of employer providers agree compared with 58% across all employers.
- 74% of FE colleges agree, compared with 59% across all training providers.

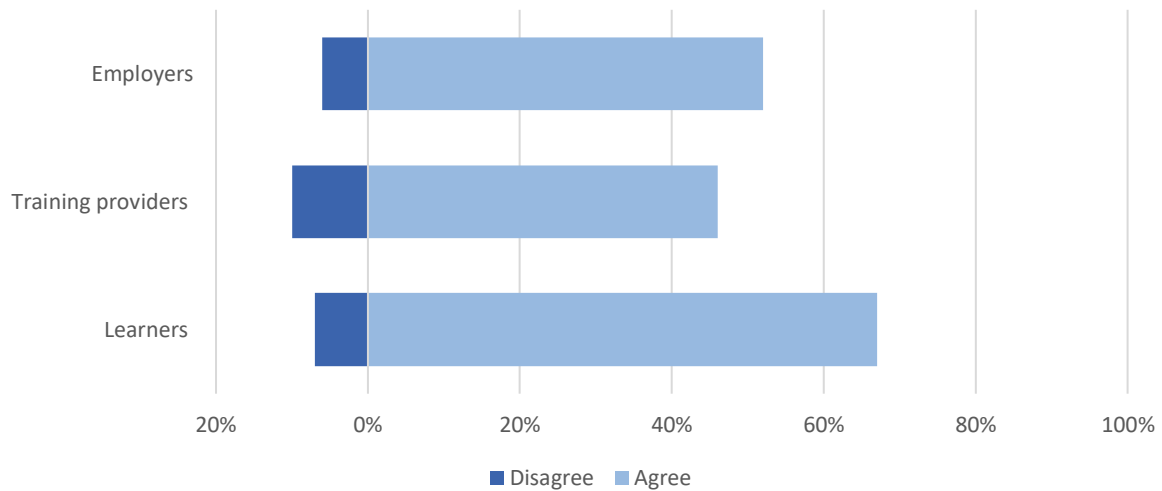
Figure 7: Responses to “People holding Functional Skills Qualifications (FSQs) have the appropriate level of skill in mathematics needed”



Base: employers (1173), training providers (527), learners (604)

- A higher proportion of large employers agree (67%) compared with micro employers (47%).
- 64% of training providers with 2000+ learners agree, compared with 47% with fewer than 100 learners.
- 73% of FE colleges agree, compared with 57% across all training providers.

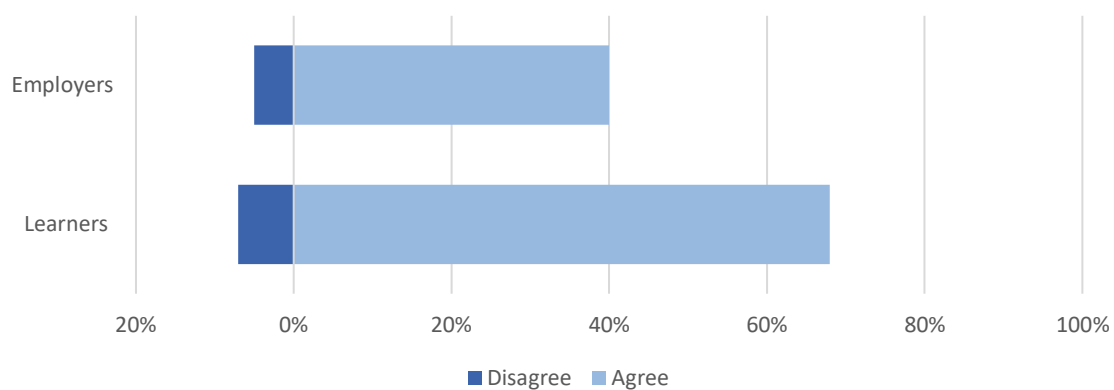
Figure 8: Responses to “People holding Functional Skills Qualifications (FSQs) have the appropriate level of skill in ICT needed”



Base: employers (1173), training providers (527), learners (602)

- A higher proportion of medium-sized employers agree (63%) compared with micro employers (44%).
- 57% of training providers with 2000+ learners agree, compared with 35% with fewer than 100 learners.

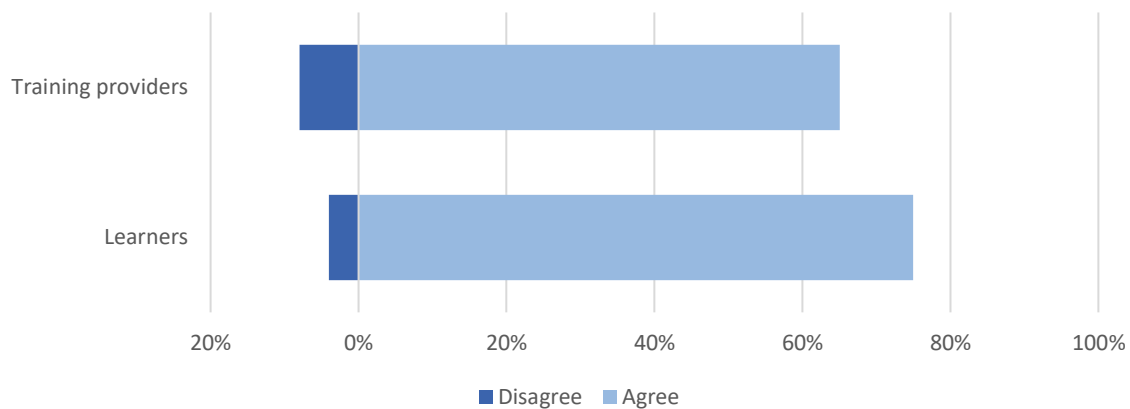
Figure 9: Responses to “The availability of Functional Skills courses and assessment is sufficiently flexible”



Base: employers (1173), learners (603)

- A higher proportion of large-sized employers agree (50%) compared with micro employers (29%).
- 72% of employer providers agree, compared with 40% across all employers.

Figure 10: Responses to “Functional Skills are good preparation for further study”



Base: training providers (525), learners (604)

- 77% of training providers with 501-2000 registered learners agree, compared with 58% with fewer than 100 learners.

2.5 Reasons for positive perceptions of Functional Skills Qualifications

There is a greater likelihood of positive perceptions of FSQs among large employers, compared with micro and small businesses. Large businesses responding to the survey say many of their job roles require FSQs because they:

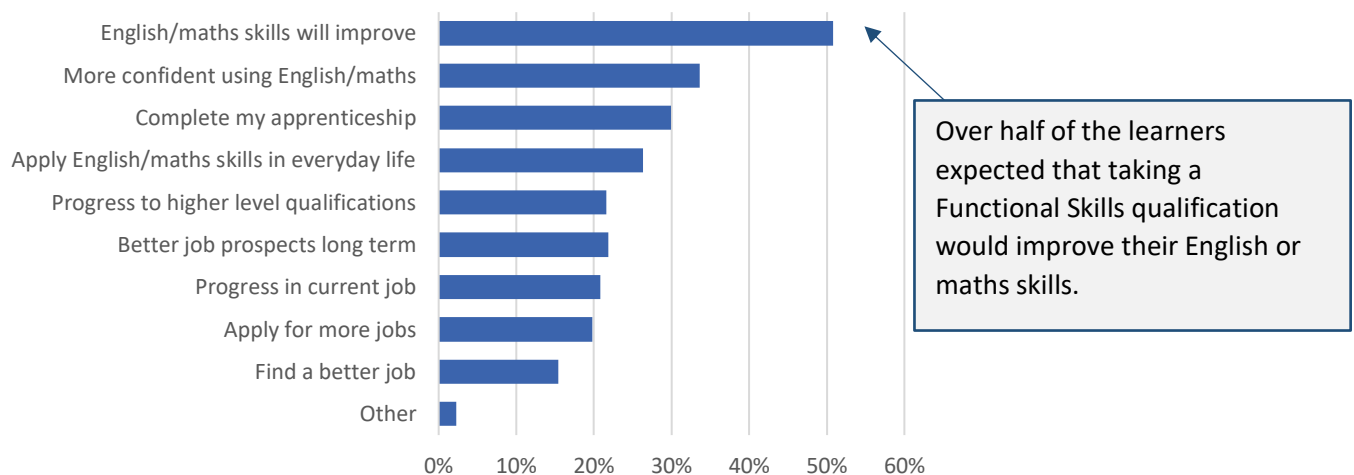
- ✓ are a good indicator of the level of competence;
- ✓ are relevant for the workplace generally;
- ✓ meet the specific needs of the business;
- ✓ are a means to support apprenticeship progression; and
- ✓ give the employer confidence that employees have a basic understanding which can be built upon, to further develop their skills.

Smaller businesses are more inclined to describe FSQs as “necessary” i.e. to do the job, or even mandatory i.e. a legal requirement (depending on industry sector – with their mandatory use more likely in highly regulated sectors). Employers of all sizes value the role they say FSQs play in embedding skills in accurate use of figures, ability to work out calculations and written ability.



2.6 Benefits associated with Functional Skills Qualifications

Figure 11: Learner perceptions of expected benefits associated with Functional Skills Qualifications (FSQs)



**Respondents could select more than one response*

Base: 384

2.7 Employer reasons for negative perceptions of Functional Skills Qualifications

Only 4% of respondents disagreed when asked if they value FSQs. Of this small number, reasons for negative perceptions are because:

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- FSQs are not viewed as being relevant to the needs of the business; and
- FSQs are considered too generic for jobs which require specific skills.

It should also be noted, however, that nearly all the employers who say they have negative perceptions of FSQs, recruit based on aptitude, attitude and relevant work experience, which are deemed more valuable than qualifications.

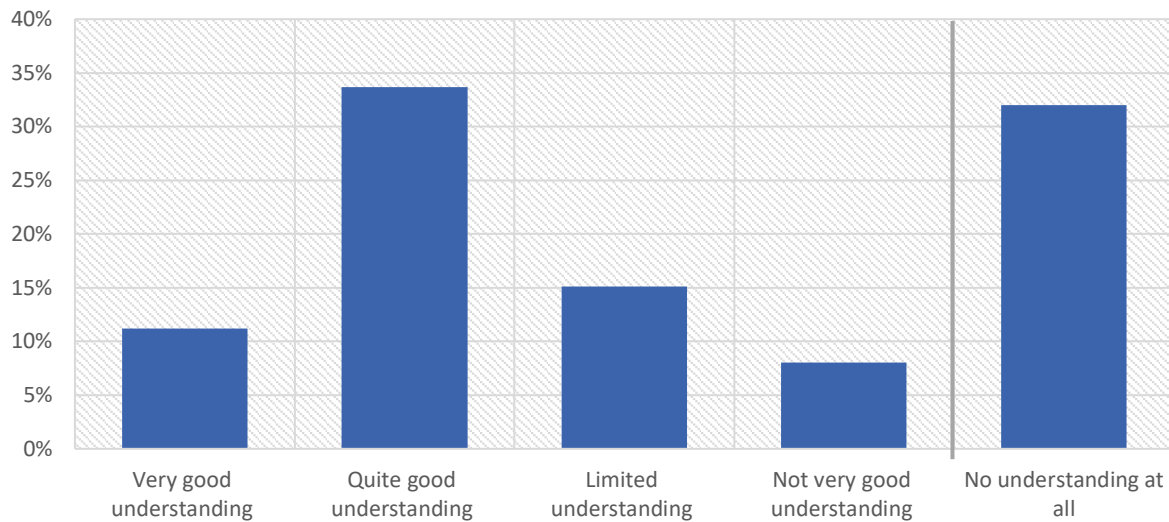
3. Perceptions of Other Vocational and Technical Qualifications

3.1 Key findings – Other Vocational and Technical Qualifications

- Other Vocational and Technical Qualifications (VTQs) are predominantly highly valued by employers, training providers and learners
- The proportion of employers holding positive perceptions of other VTQs is predominantly high, with employers saying:
 - they value other VTQs: 91%
 - the purpose of other VTQs is well-understood: 87%
 - Other VTQs prepare learners well for the workplace: 83%
 - Other VTQs equip learners with relevant technical skills: 82%
- Other VTQs are significantly more likely to be viewed positively when taken as part of an apprenticeship and to lead to outcomes such as a pay increase or promotion, rather than when they are standalone qualifications
- Other VTQs are valued by employers because of their relevance, capacity to equip learners with technical as well as softer skills, and to prepare learners for the workplace. Learners who take other VTQs expect improvement in their vocational and technical skills as a result
- Few employers (2%) disagreed when asked if they value other VTQs; those that disagree say they are not relevant for their business or do not make the learner competent
- Large businesses are significantly more likely than micro businesses to have a very or quite good understanding of other VTQs, and to hold positive perceptions of them
- Employers in the real estate and professional, scientific and technical sectors have the lowest level of understanding of other VTQs compared with other sectors; which is likely to reflect how commonly they are used in these industries
- Employers refer to City & Guilds and Pearson as their most commonly used VTQ brands (ie type of awarding organisation or examination board), and NVQs and BTECs the most commonly used type of other VTQ
- Learners with prior experience of the workplace are significantly more likely to have positive perceptions of other VTQs than learners with no work experience

3.2 Understanding of other Vocational and Technical Qualifications

Figure 12: Employer understanding of other Vocational and Technical Qualifications (VTQs)



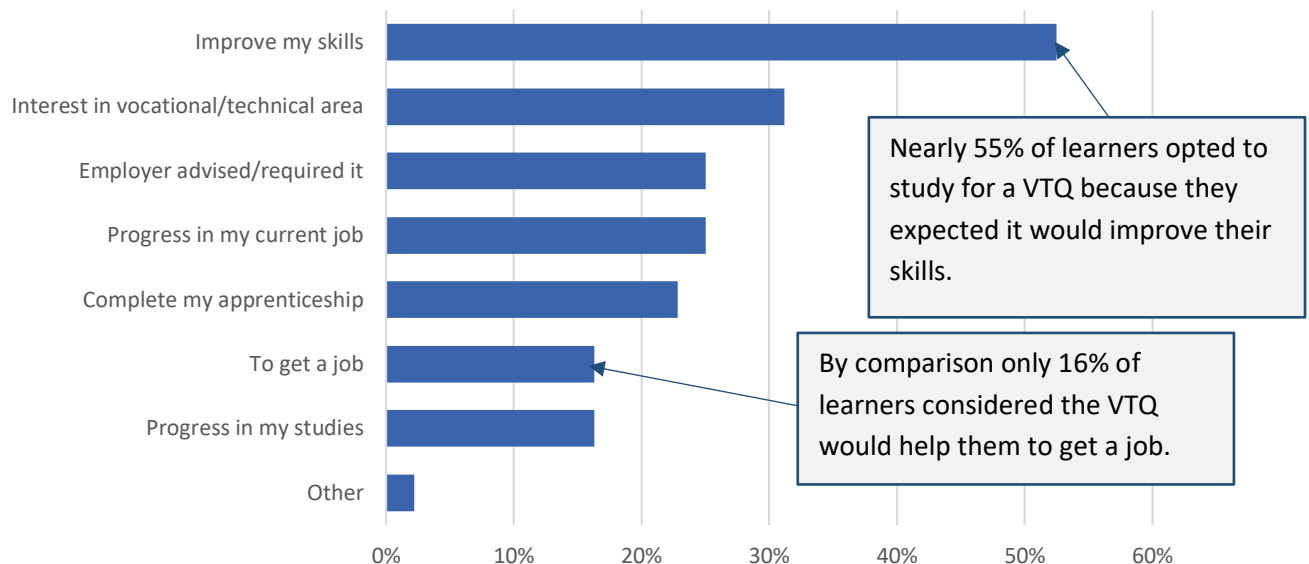
Base: 2070⁶

- The level of understanding of other VTQs increases with organisation size.
- 72% of large employers report a very good or quite good understanding, compared with 36% of micro employers.
- Understanding of other VTQs is lower among employers in the real estate and professional, scientific and technical sectors (10% and 27% with a very good or quite good understanding, respectively).
- Understanding is highest in the education sector (84% of respondents with a very good or quite good understanding).
- The level of understanding increases where training is provided; 58% of employers report very good or quite good understanding compared with 29% who have not offered training in the last year.

⁶ The total base number of respondents was 2070. The respondents that had no understanding at all was 807, meaning these respondents did not answer further questions related to Functional Skills and the new base was 1263.

3.3 Why learners chose other Vocational and Technical Qualifications

Figure 13: Learner views on why they chose to take other Vocational and Technical Qualifications (VTQs)



**Respondents could select more than one response*

Base: 356

3.4 Perceptions of other Vocational and Technical Qualifications

3.4.1 Types of other Vocational and Technical Qualifications

Employers were asked which other VTQs they offer to their staff. The vast majority say they offer National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs), with a small number referring to BTECs. As with Functional Skills Qualifications, few employers were aware of the brand (ie type of awarding organisation or examination board), and referred instead to the title of the qualification. Where employers were aware of the brand, it was predominantly City & Guilds and Pearson.

Employers cite a wide range of NVQs mostly at Levels 1, 2 and 3, with around 4% saying they offer NVQs at Levels 4 and above.

Perceptions of Vocational and Technical Qualifications

Subjects include:

- Agriculture and countryside management
- Agricultural engineering
- Animal care
- Brickwork
- Business and accountancy
- Childcare
- Digital marketing
- Electrical
- Engineering
- Environmental awareness
- First aid
- Food hygiene
- Hair and beauty
- Horticulture
- Hospitality and catering
- Joinery
- Mechanical engineering
- Motor vehicle maintenance
- Pharmacy dispensing
- Plant operations
- Plastering
- Retail
- Scaffolding
- Team leading
- Warehousing and storage
- Youth work

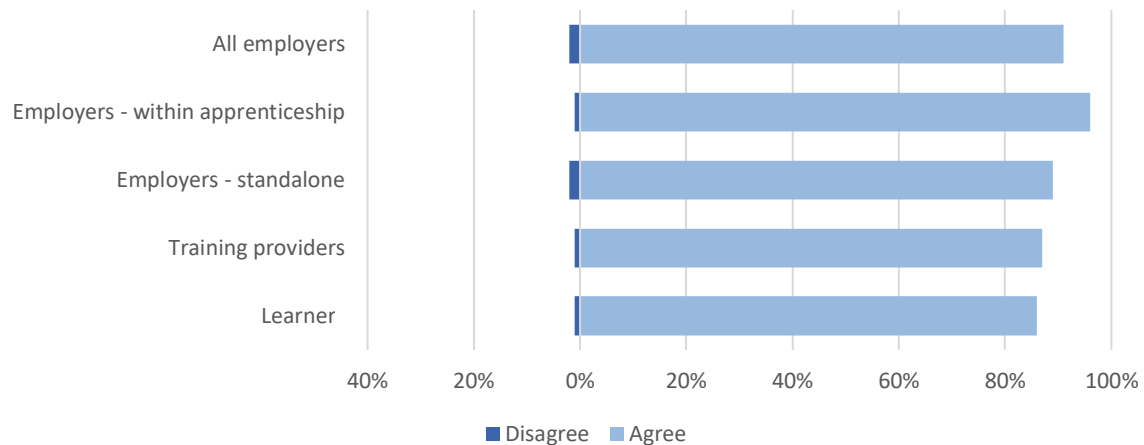
3.4.2 Perceptions of other Vocational and Technical Qualifications

Employers, training providers and learners were asked to rate their level of agreement with a series of statements about other VTQs. Statements varied slightly depending on respondent group, hence not all questions were asked of all three groups, or wording was adapted accordingly.

Figures 14 to 20 present these perceptions⁷. Employers were also asked whether they were thinking of VTQs within apprenticeships, or as standalone qualifications; the figures show the views of all employers, and then the two sub-sets of these ie employers speaking of other VTQs within apprenticeships, and employers speaking of other VTQs as standalone qualifications.

⁷ Figures show aggregations of strongly agree/agree and disagree/strongly disagree. Responses of neither agree or disagree, don't know, or prefer not to say, are not shown hence bars will not total 100%

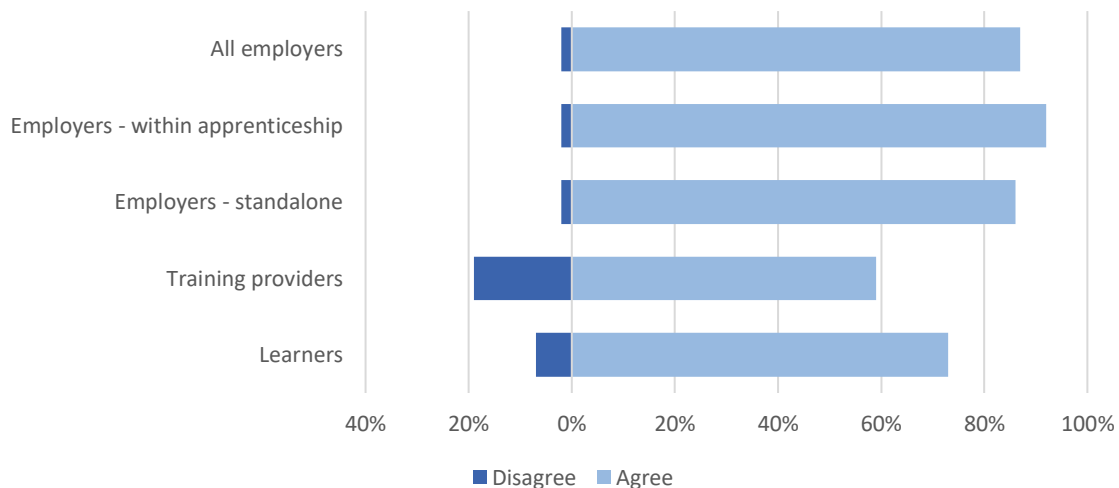
Figure 14: Responses to “We value Vocational and Technical Qualifications (VTQs)”



Base: all employers (968 [310 within apprenticeship, 617 standalone]⁸), training providers (531), learners (601)

- Other VTQs are predominantly highly valued, more so within apprenticeships.
- A higher proportion of large employers agree (84%) compared with 64% of micro businesses.

Figure 15: Responses to “The purpose of Vocational and Technical Qualifications (VTQs) is well-understood by employers”



Base: all employers (968 [310 within apprenticeship, 617 standalone]⁹), training providers (529), learners (601)

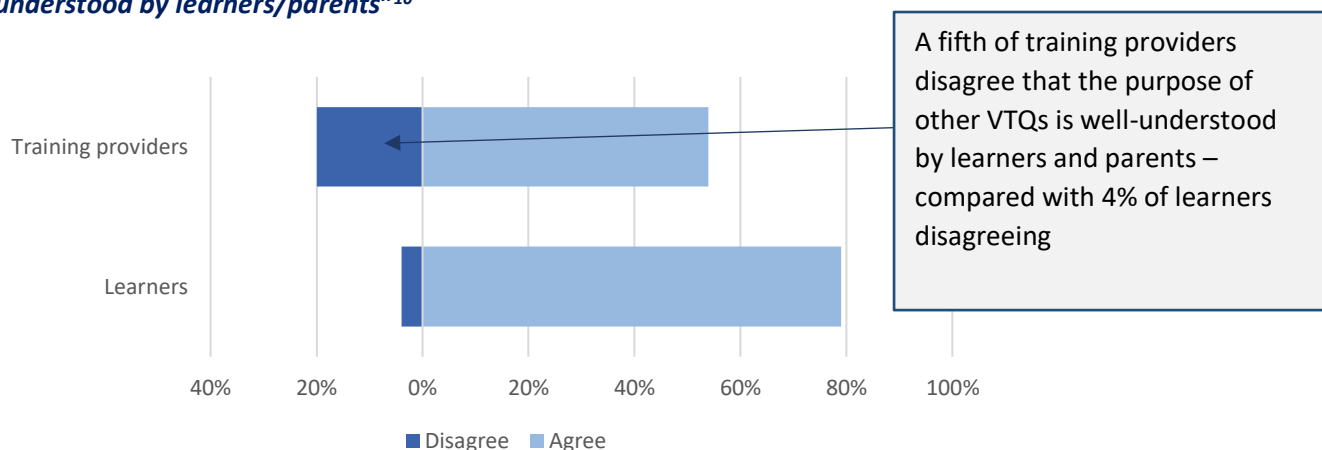
⁸ The remaining 41 preferred not to say

⁹ The remaining 41 preferred not to say

Perceptions of Vocational and Technical Qualifications

- There is a marked difference between training provider views and those of employers and learners, with nearly a fifth of training providers disagreeing that the purpose of other VTQs is well-understood by employers.

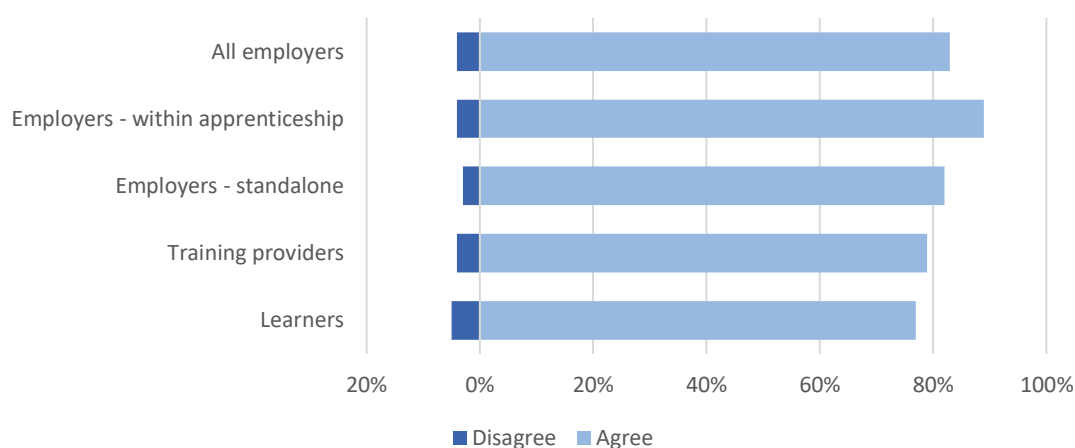
Figure 16: Responses to “The purpose of Vocational and Technical Qualifications (VTQs) is well-understood by learners/parents”¹⁰



Base: training providers (529), learners (601)

- A higher proportion of Further Education Colleges agree (67%) compared with 55% of independent training providers.

Figure 17: Responses to “Vocational and Technical Qualifications (VTQs) prepare learners well for the workplace”



Base: all employers (968 [310 within apprenticeship, 617 standalone]¹¹), training providers (527), learners (601)

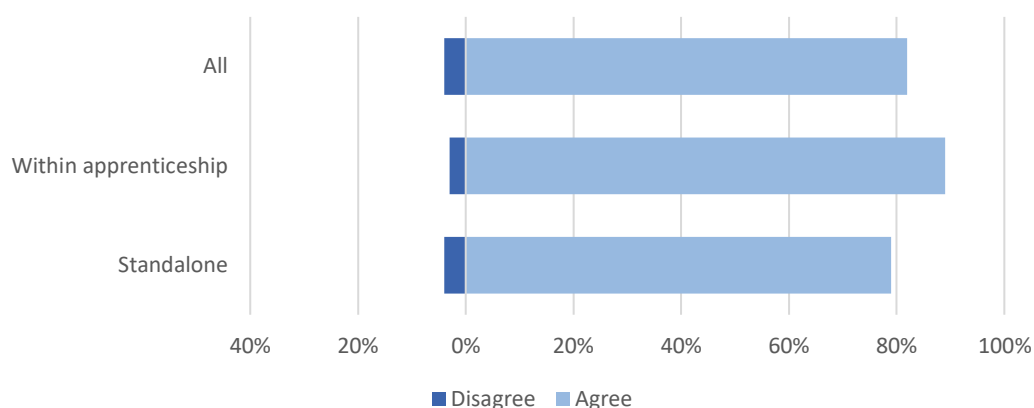
¹⁰ Learners were asked to respond on their own behalf, while training providers were asked to respond about learners and parents where appropriate

¹¹ The remaining 41 preferred not to say

Perceptions of Vocational and Technical Qualifications

- There is greater agreement among employers in the North-East (93%) than in other regions.
- A higher proportion of learners with work experience agree (81%) compared with those with no prior experience of the workplace (72%).

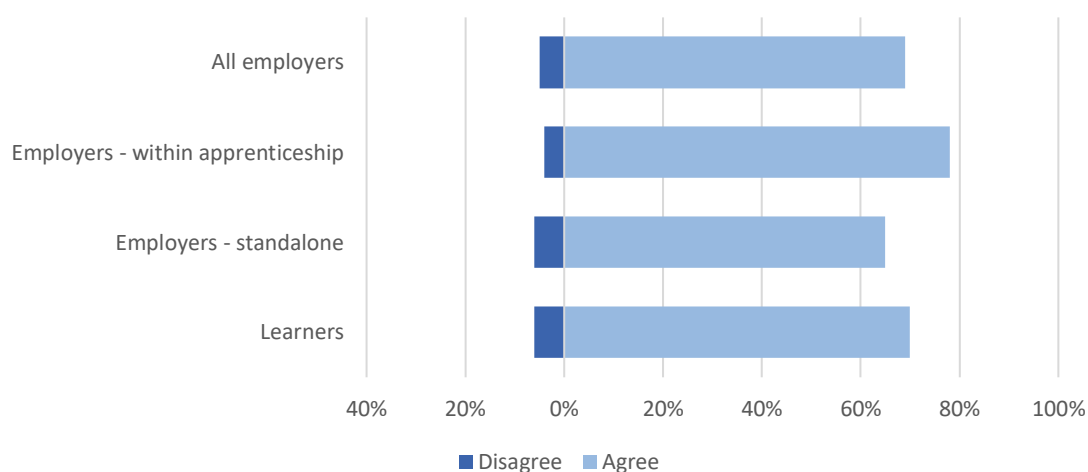
Figure 18: Responses to “People achieving Vocational and Technical Qualifications (VTQs) have the technical skills needed by my organisation”



Base: all employers (968 [310 within apprenticeship, 617 standalone]¹²)

- A higher proportion of employers agree, when thinking about other VTQs within an apprenticeship (89%), compared with those viewing other VTQs as a standalone qualification (79%).

Figure 19: Responses to “Availability of Vocational and Technical Qualifications (VTQs) is sufficiently flexible”



Base: all employers (968 [310 within apprenticeship, 617 standalone]¹³), learners (601)

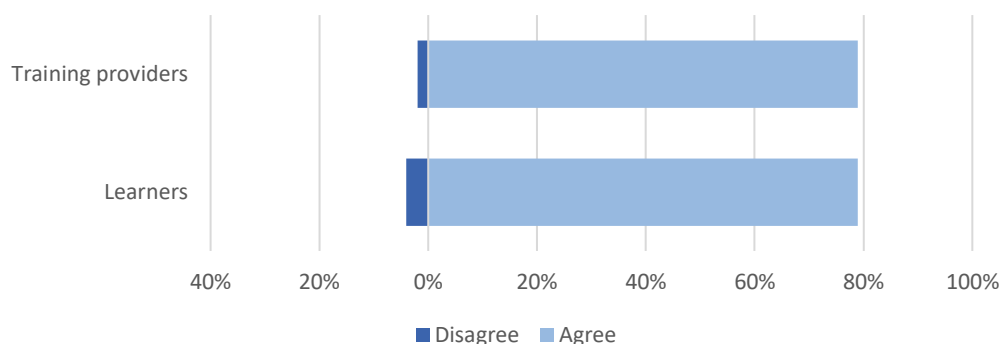
¹² The remaining 41 preferred not to say

¹³ The remaining 41 preferred not to say

Perceptions of Vocational and Technical Qualifications

- Three-quarters of large employers agree, compared with just over two-thirds of micro businesses.
- A higher proportion of employers in the manufacturing sector agree (72%) compared with 69% (all employers).

Figure 20: Responses to “Vocational and Technical Qualifications (VTQs) are good preparation for further study”



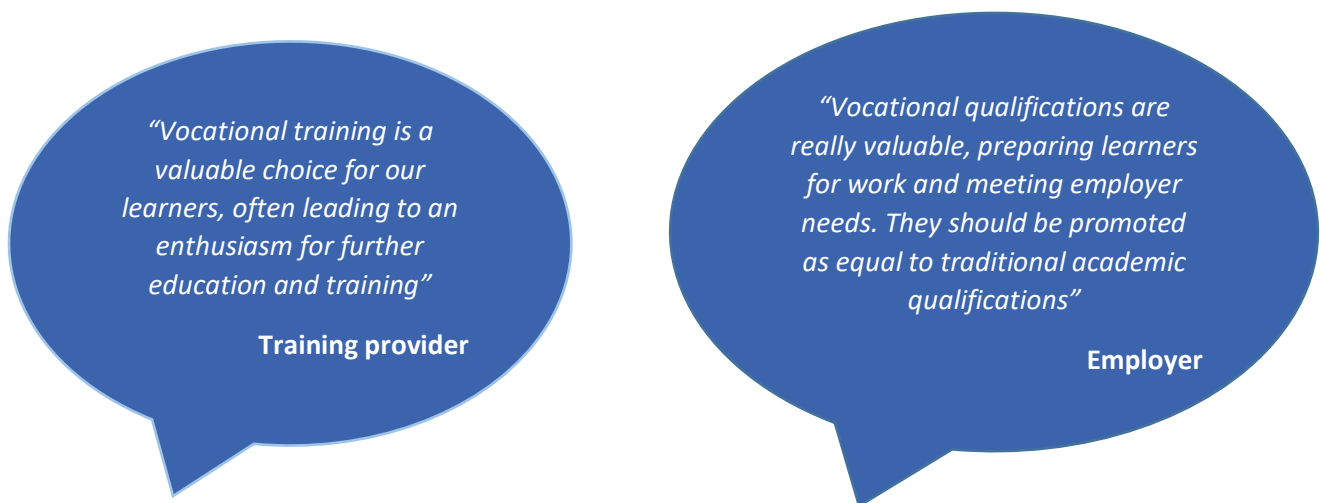
Base: training providers (526), learners (603)

- A higher proportion of learners with prior experience of the workplace agree (80%), compared with learners with no work experience (67%).

3.5 Reasons for positive perceptions of other Vocational and Technical Qualifications

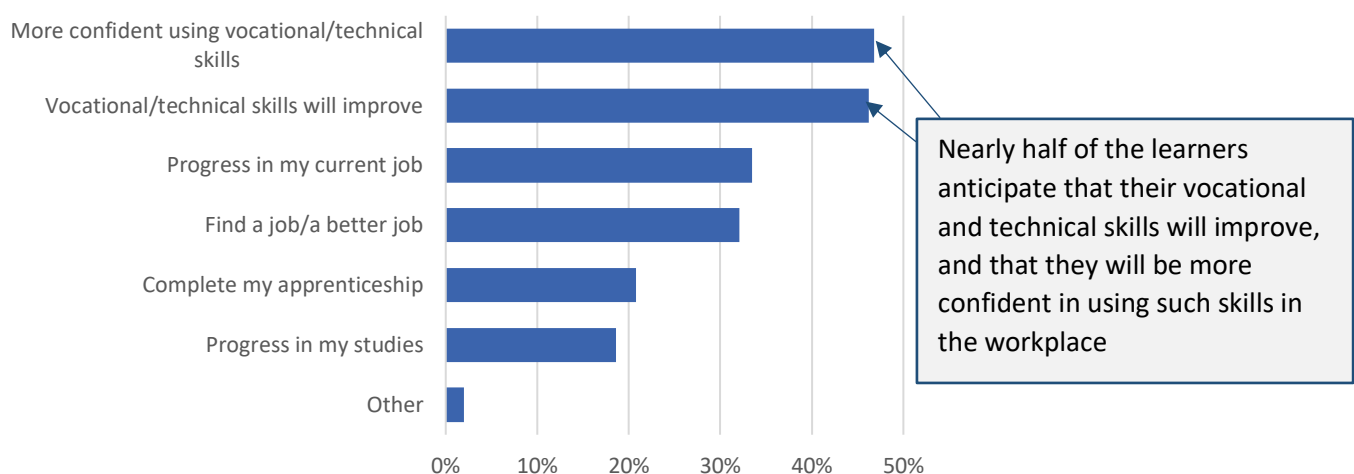
Employers strongly agreeing that they value other VTQs, were asked to explain why they think this. The most common reasons (in order of most to least cited) were:

- they are very relevant to the work being undertaken;
- they equip learners with employability and ‘softer’ skills such as communication, team working and problem solving;
- they have clearly defined progression pathways, helping learners understand how they can move forward in their chosen career;
- they are a good mix of learning, practice and assessment; and
- they are a valuable alternative for learners who do not wish to pursue an academic route.



3.6 Benefits associated with other Vocational and Technical Qualifications

Figure 21: Learner perceptions of expected benefits associated with other Vocational and Technical Qualifications (VTQs)



**Respondents could select more than one response*

Base: 355



Perceptions of Vocational and Technical Qualifications

Employers were asked whether achieving other VTQs typically results in a pay rise, promotion or improved job status, or allocation of new responsibilities for employees (Figure 22).

Figure 22: Employer views – outcomes for employees after completion of other Vocational and Technical Qualifications (VTQs)¹⁴



Base: employers within an apprenticeship: pay increase (755), promotion/improved status (752), new responsibilities (754) and standalone: pay increase (672), promotion/improved status (674), new responsibilities (674)

- Respondents report that pay increases, promotion/improved job status or new responsibilities are more prevalent all or most of the time¹⁵ where other VTQs are completed as part of an apprenticeship, rather than a standalone qualification.
- The likelihood of a pay increase or promotion/improved job status after completion of other VTQs is higher in large companies. On average, 51% of large companies offer these all or most of the time, compared with 30% of micro businesses saying the same.

3.7 Reasons for negative perceptions of other Vocational and Technical Qualifications

Only 2% of respondents disagreed when asked if they value other VTQs. Of this small number, reasons for negative perceptions were that they are not deemed relevant for their workplace, and learners are not considered competent even after achieving the qualification, ie it is not considered fit for purpose.

¹⁴ 'Don't know' responses are excluded

¹⁵ Percentages for responses of 'all of the time' and 'most of the time' have been combined

4. Perceptions of End-Point Assessments

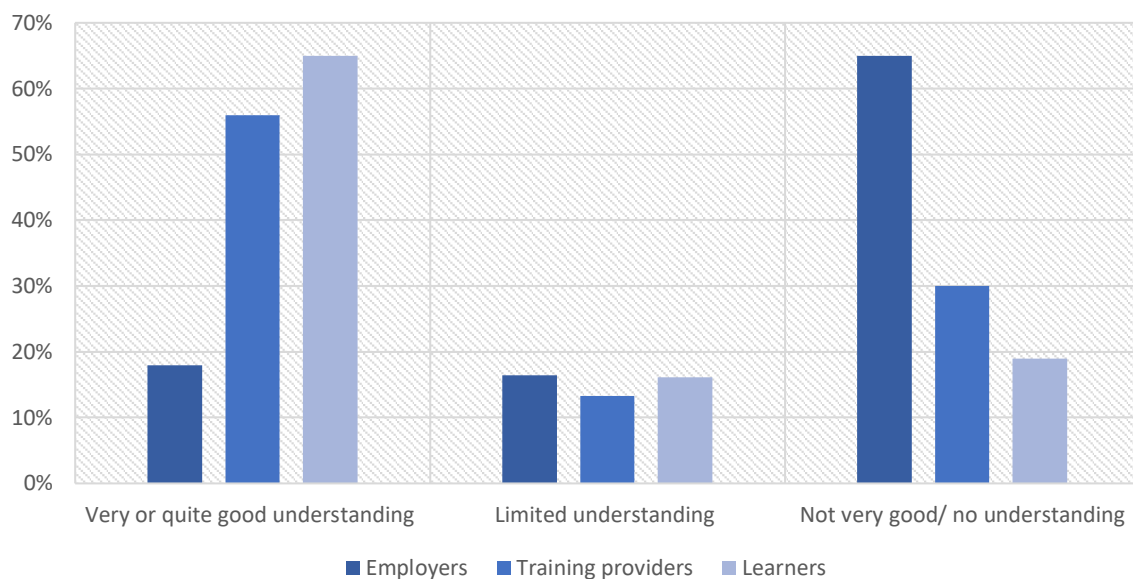
4.1 Key findings – End-Point Assessments

- A significantly higher proportion of training providers have a very good or quite good understanding of EPAs (56%) compared with employers (18%). Nearly 70% of training providers say they understand the difference between apprenticeship frameworks and standards, compared with 20% of employers who say the same
- A significantly higher proportion of large employers report a very or quite good understanding of EPAs compared with micro employers, including knowing the difference between apprenticeship standards and frameworks, and that EPAs are specific to apprenticeship standards
- A significantly higher proportion of training providers have negative perceptions of EPAs compared with employers and learners; 14% of training providers disagree when asked if they value EPAs (compared with 5% of employers and 3% of learners saying the same)
- Nearly a fifth of training providers strongly disagree that EPAs measure the skills and knowledge employers want them to (compared with 2% of employers saying the same). Employers appear unaware of how to get the assessment changed if so desired
- Nearly a fifth of training providers disagree when asked if learners understand the purpose of EPAs – but learner views do not support this, with only 5% of learners who disagree
- A significantly higher proportion of learners aged 16-18 agree that EPAs are flexible, and that they value them – compared with learners in other age brackets
- Where EPAs are valued, this is because they are perceived to consolidate learning, support progression and demonstrate learners have reached the required standard
- Where EPAs are not valued, this is attributed to the final assessment being off-putting for learners, and because “one bad day” can result in failure even if the learner is capable of passing

4.2 Understanding of End-Point Assessments

In regards to this section, it is worth noting that interviewers explained the context of EPAs to respondents. However, when answering questions on this subject respondents may have been thinking about apprenticeships in general, including current apprenticeship frameworks. As very few EPAs had taken place at the time of the fieldwork, it is unlikely that many respondents would have had exposure to them prior to completing it. This should be taken into account when considering the following findings.

Figure 23: Understanding of End-Point Assessments (EPAs)

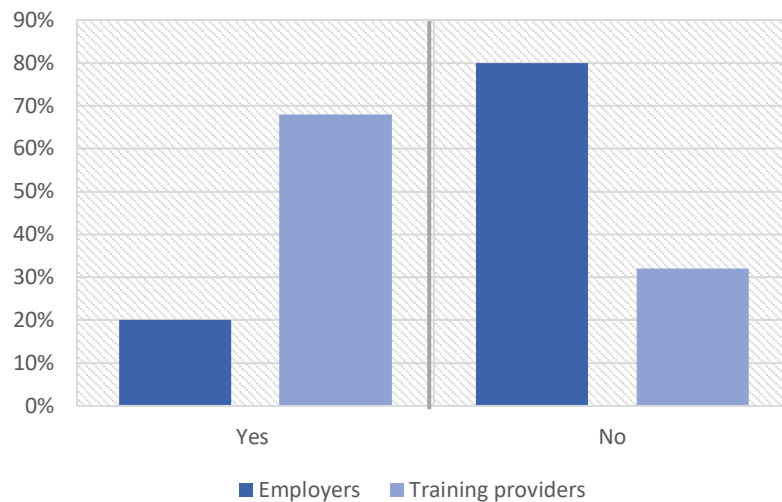


Base¹⁶: employers (1259), training providers (525), learners (280)

- Training providers have a significantly higher level of understanding of EPAs than employers, with nearly three times as many training providers as employers reporting a very good or quite good understanding.
- The level of understanding of EPAs increases with organisation size. 40% of large employers report a very good or quite good understanding, compared with 13% of micro employers.
- Nearly two-thirds of employers report a very good or quite good understanding if they have been part of a trailblazer group.

¹⁶ Numbers that indicated they had no understanding at all (and so were not asked about their perceptions of EPAs: 567 employers, 126 training providers and 39 learners)

Figure 24: Do you understand the difference between apprenticeship frameworks and new apprenticeship standards?

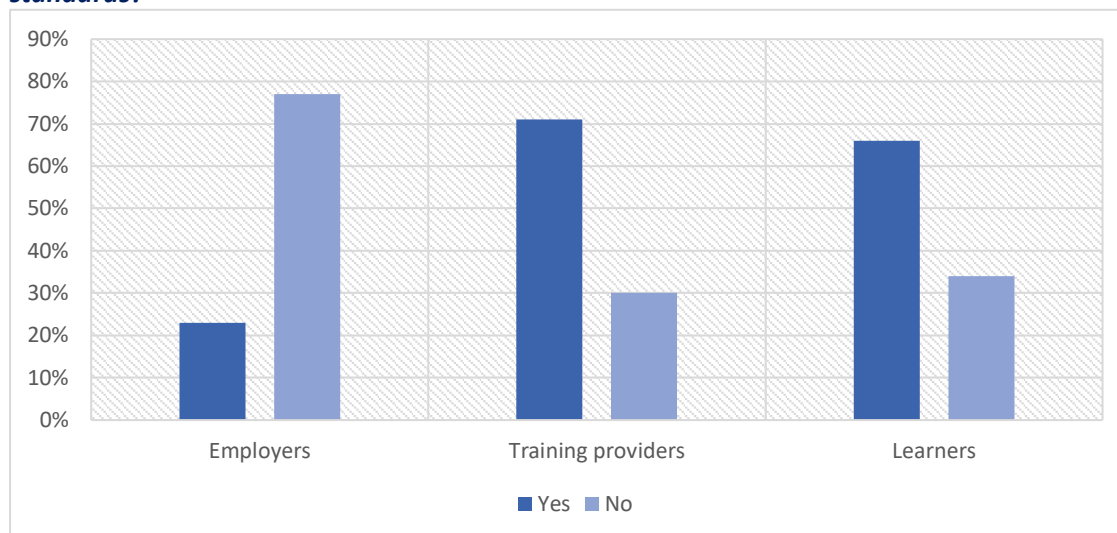


Base: employers (1253), training providers (526)

- Nearly 70% of training providers understand the difference, compared with around a fifth of employers. Understanding is higher among training providers with 2000+ learners (74%) than those with fewer than 100 learners (57%).
- 45% of large employers say they understand the difference, compared with 11% of micro businesses.

Perceptions of Vocational and Technical Qualifications

Figure 25: Are you aware that End-Point Assessments (EPAs) are specific to apprenticeship standards?

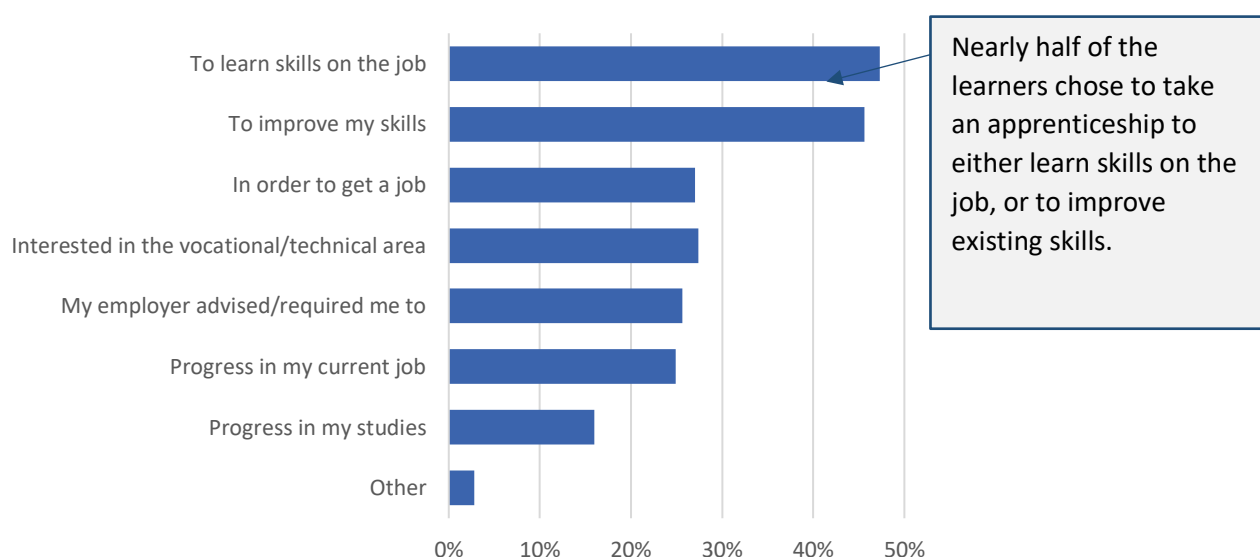


Base: employers (1242), training providers (526), learners (276)

- 46% of large employers say they are aware of this, compared with 14% of micro businesses.
- Awareness is significantly higher in the health and social care sector (40%), compared with awareness from all sectors (average of 23%).

4.3 Why learners chose an apprenticeship

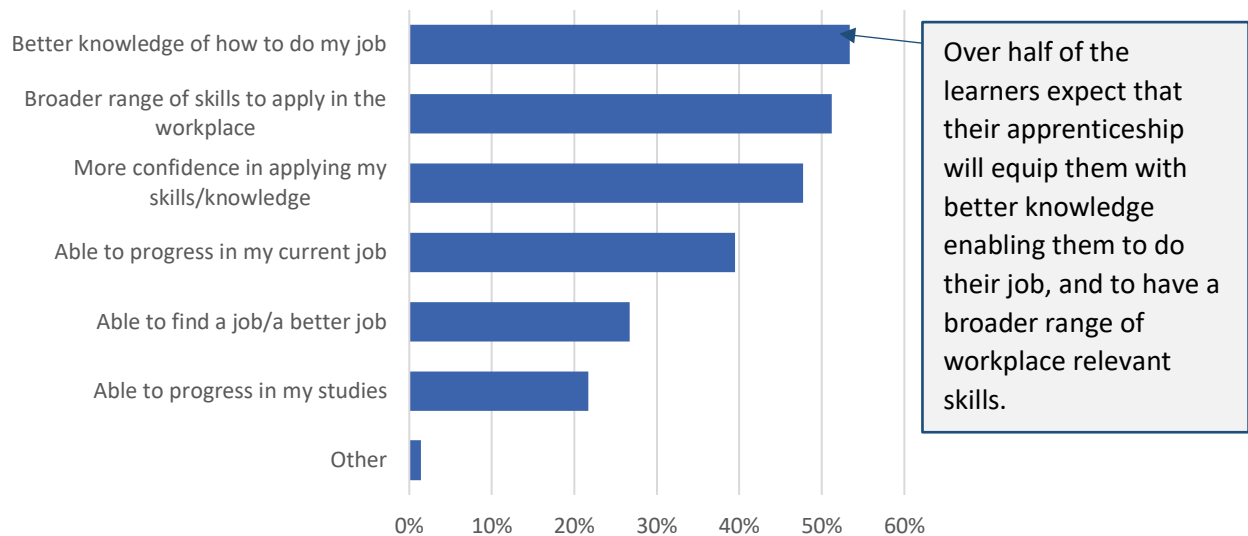
Figure 26: Why did you choose to take an apprenticeship?



*Respondents could select more than one response

Base: 281

Figure 27: What benefits did you expect to gain from completing an apprenticeship?



**Respondents could select more than one response*

Base: 281

4.4 Perceptions of End-Point Assessments

4.4.1 Apprenticeships cited by respondents when answering the survey questions

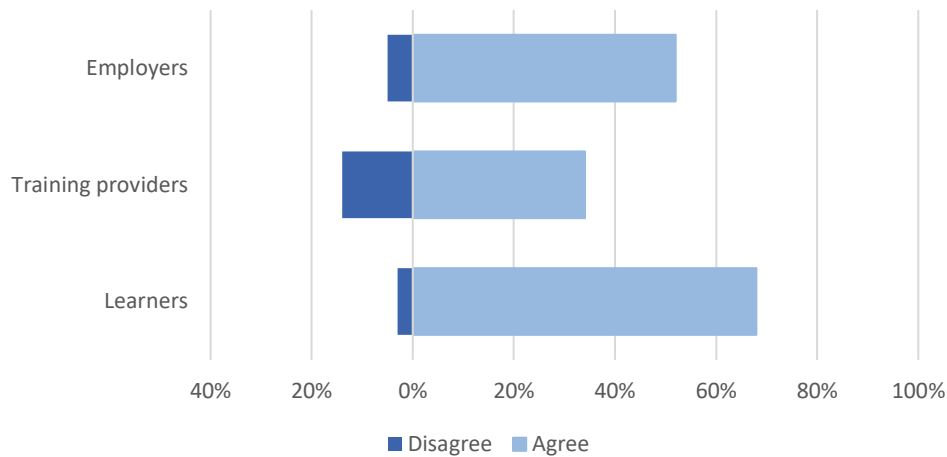
Respondents were asked which apprenticeships they had in mind, when answering questions about EPAs. The most commonly cited were:

- Accountancy
- Business administration
- Customer service
- Engineering
- Health & Social Care
- Hospitality
- Joinery
- Mechanical apprenticeship
- Motor and vehicle maintenance
- Warehousing

4.4.2 Perceptions of End-Point Assessments

It should be noted that fewer respondents responded to questions about EPAs compared with questions about qualifications, so there are not as many statistically significant comparisons between respondent groups.

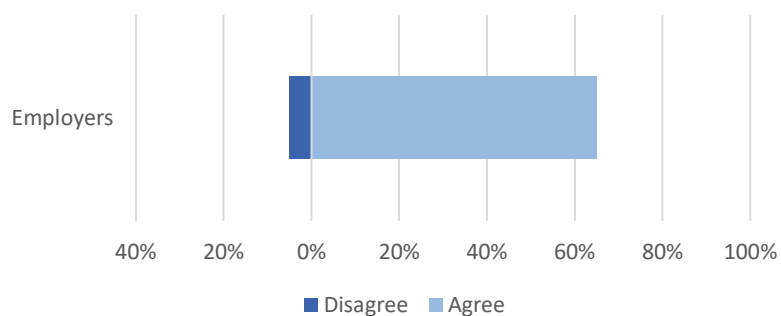
Figure 28: Responses to “We value End-Point Assessments (EPAs)”



Base: employers (435), training providers (529), learners (605)

- A significantly higher proportion of training providers disagree that they value EPAs, compared with employers and learners.
- A higher proportion of learners aged 16-18 agree (75% compared with 70% of all learners).

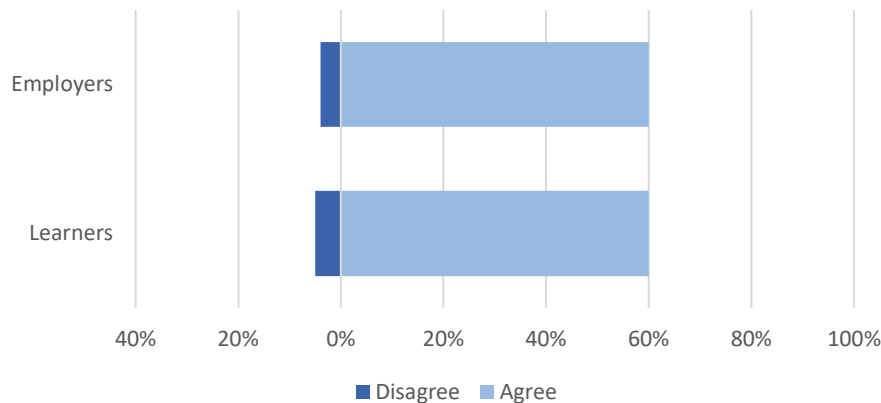
Figure 29: Response to “People passing End-Point Assessments (EPAs) have the vocational and technical skills needed by my organisation (employers only)”



Base: 229

- A significantly higher proportion of large employers agree (70%), compared with micro businesses (59%).

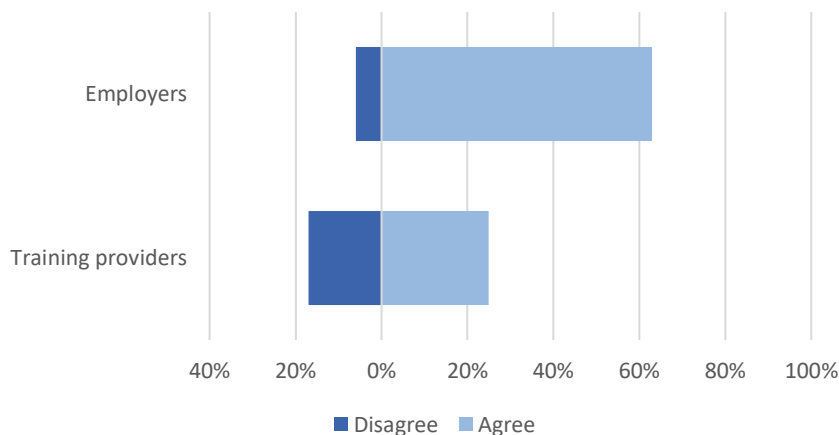
Figure 30: Responses to “Availability of End-Point Assessments (EPAs) is sufficiently flexible”



Base: employers (229), learners (601)

- A higher proportion of learners aged 16-18 agree (71% compared with 60% of all learners).

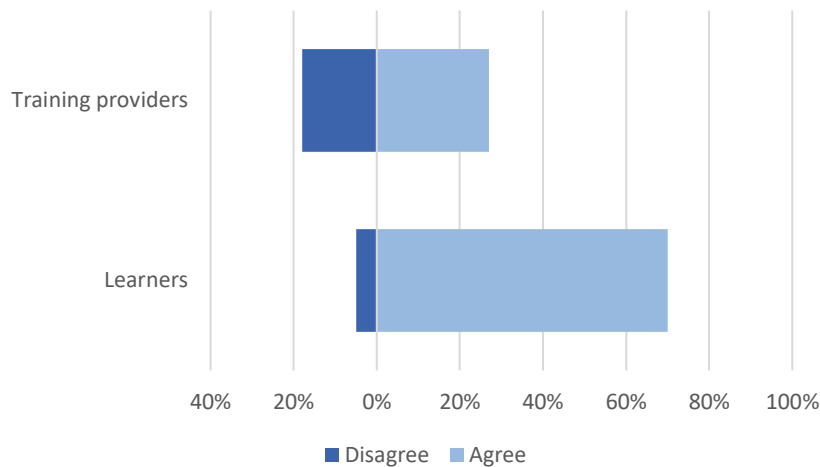
Figure 31: Responses to “I am confident that End-Point Assessments (EPAs) measure the skills and knowledge that employers want them to”



Base: employers (229), training providers (527)

- A significantly higher proportion of training providers with fewer than 100 learners disagree (27%), compared with 17% of those with 2000+ learners.

Employers who said they were not confident that EPAs measure the skills and knowledge that they wanted them to, were asked if they know how to go about getting the assessment changed. Only 3 people said yes – but were unable to articulate how they would go about this.

Figure 32: Responses to “Learners understand the purpose of End-Point Assessments (EPAs)”

Base: training providers (524), learners (602)

- 77% of learners with experience of the workplace agree, compared with 61% of learners with no prior work experience.

4.5 Reasons for positive perceptions of End-Point Assessments

Employers who said they strongly value EPAs were asked to explain why they think this. The most common reasons (in the order of most to least cited) are:

- they show the learner has reached the required standard;
- they consolidate learning; and
- they help the learner to progress.

A small number of providers volunteered reasons for their positive perceptions of EPAs, saying that they improve the value of the apprenticeship for both learner and employer, and that employers are starting to get more involved in deciding whether the learner is ready for assessment.

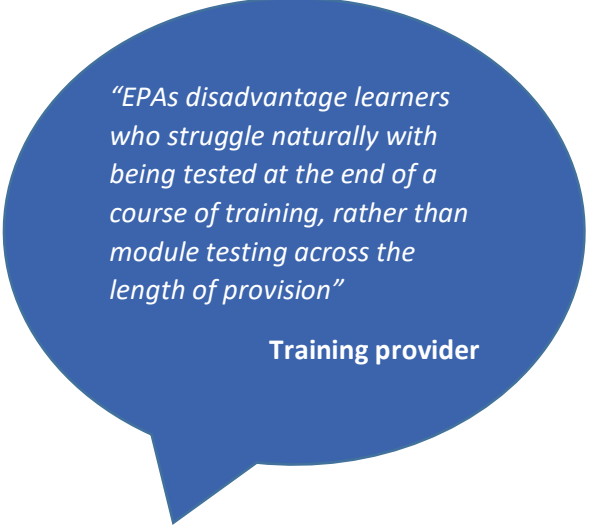
“End-Point Assessments are gaining pace with many of our employers. Employers like the idea that what is learned on the first day, can be tested on the last day”

Training provider

4.6 Reasons for negative perceptions of End-Point Assessments


As described in section 4.4.2, a higher proportion of training providers, compared with employers and learners, hold negative perceptions of EPAs. They argue that continual assessment is a better approach, as one final assessment means that a learner can have “a bad day” and fail even though they are very capable of passing. One training provider has experienced what was in their view, a disproportionately high number of failures because they say apprentices were put under “extreme exam conditions”.

Some training providers also say the concept of a final assessment is off-putting for learners, who may decide against an apprenticeship in consequence. Training providers also say the concept of EPAs may prevent learners from completing an apprenticeship if they lose their job prior to the completion date.



“EPAs disadvantage learners who struggle naturally with being tested at the end of a course of training, rather than module testing across the length of provision”

Training provider



“If a learner loses their job prior to the completion date, currently they are able to complete on a framework or carry on in a new workplace – it is not clear this can happen with the new standards and EPA”

Training provider

5. Use of qualifications for recruitment and training

5.1 Key findings – use of qualifications for recruitment and training

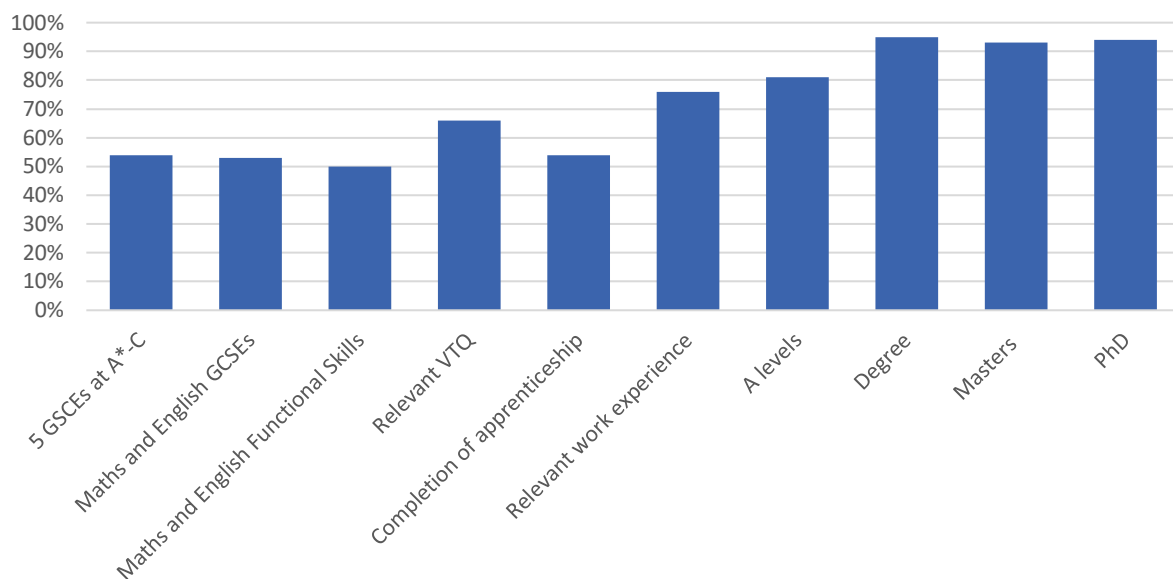
- A relatively high proportion of employers consider a relevant VTQ to be essential when recruiting at middle and senior levels within their organisations:
 - Professional and managerial roles: 66%
 - Skilled and supervisory roles: 78%
- Three-quarters of employers consider completion of an apprenticeship to be essential when recruiting for skilled and supervisory roles
- Nearly three-quarters of employers (72%) consider achievement of maths and English Functional Skills to be essential when recruiting for entry and admin roles
- Two-thirds of employers say that some, most or all training they offer to employees results in a qualification
- A significantly higher proportion of large businesses (on average 49%) say that all or most of the training they offer results in a qualification, compared with micro businesses (on average 35%), across all three levels (professional and managerial, skilled and supervisory, and entry and admin)
- Nearly two-thirds of employers say the training arranged/ funded in the last 12 months resulted in a Vocational or Technical Qualification
- The majority of employers saying that the training they offered did not lead to a qualification, say that this is because their organisation/employees do not need a qualification (ie non-accredited informal training is deemed sufficient)

5.2 Qualifications deemed essential at different occupational levels

All charts in sections 5.2 – 5.5 are employer perceptions only – just employers were asked these questions.

Half the employers surveyed consider Maths and English Functional Skills essential, while two-thirds of employers (66%) consider a relevant VTQ to be essential for professional and managerial roles (Figure 33).

Figure 33: When recruiting new employees, are any of the following essential for professional and managerial roles?

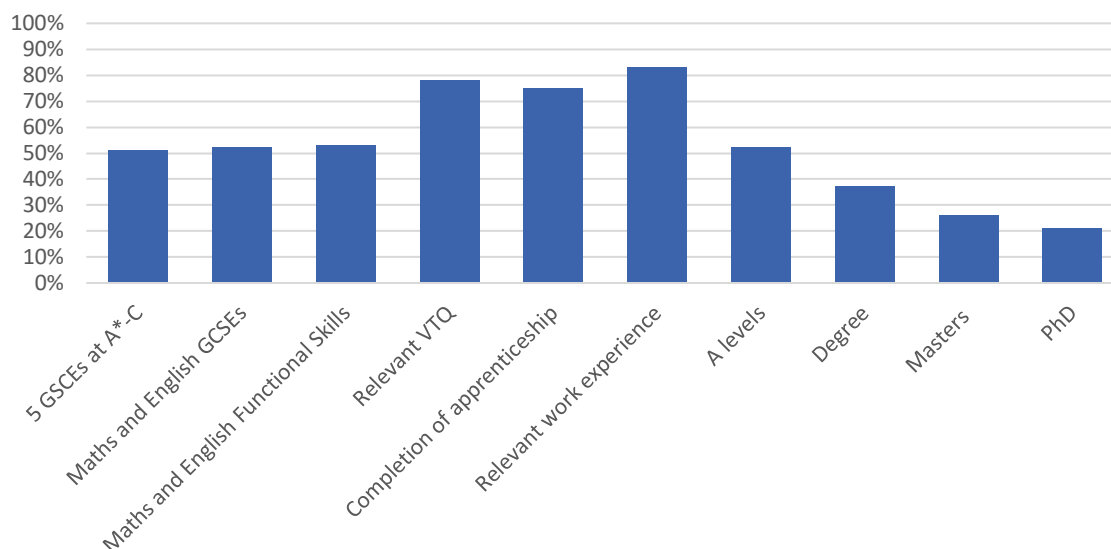


Bases per option: 773, 793, 468, 770, 341, 1446, 581, 603, 182, 102

Perceptions of Vocational and Technical Qualifications

Three-quarters of employers consider completion of an apprenticeship to be essential at skilled and supervisory level, and nearly 80% say the same in respect of a relevant VTQ (Figure 34).

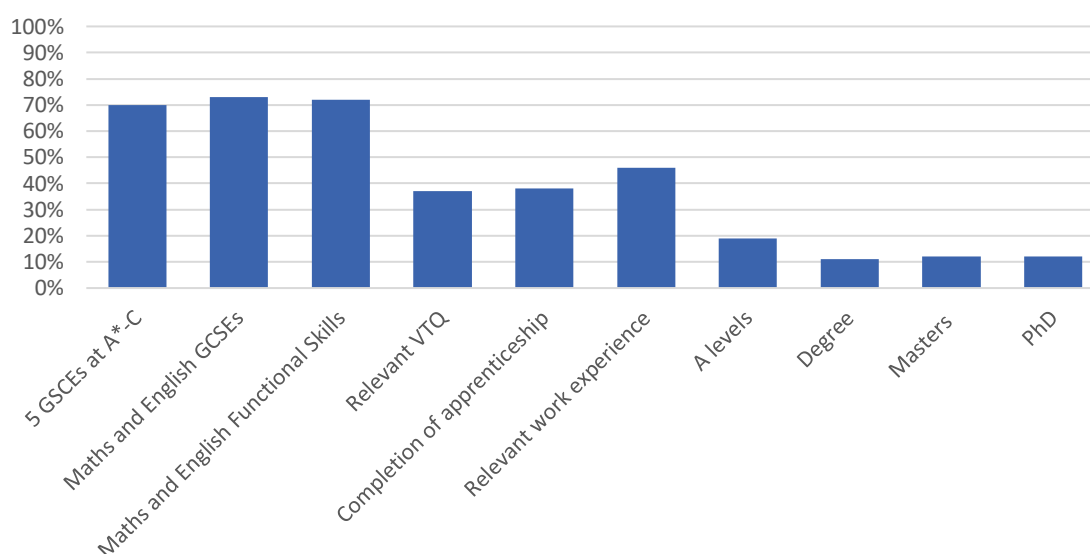
Figure 34: When recruiting new employees, are any of the following essential for skilled and supervisory roles?



Bases per option: 773, 793, 468, 770, 341, 1446, 581, 603, 182, 102

Nearly three-quarters of employers consider Maths and English Functional Skills essential for entry and admin roles (Figure 35).

Figure 35: When recruiting new employees, are any of the following essential for entry and admin roles?

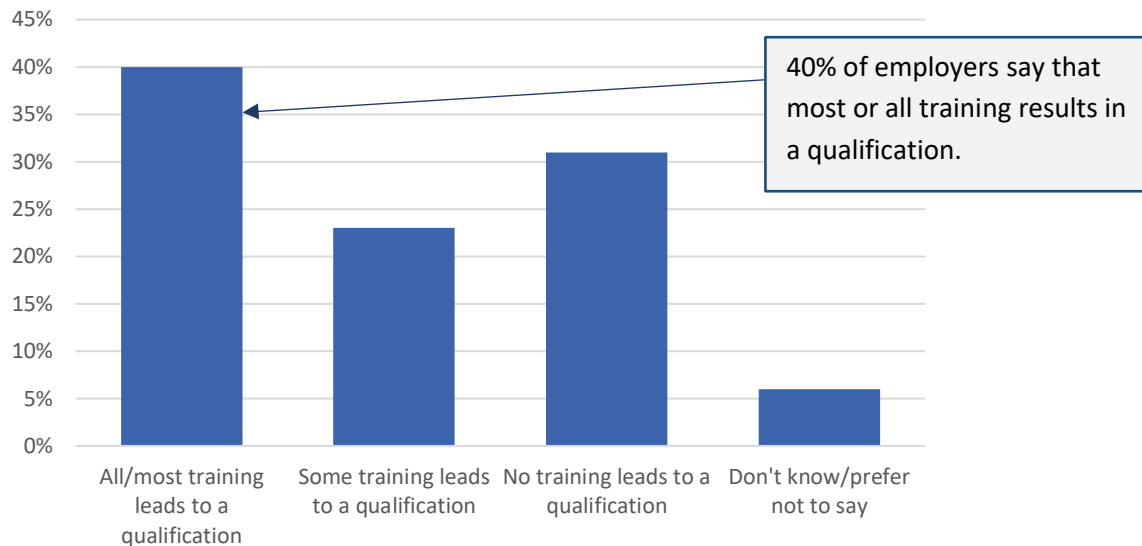


Bases per option: 773, 793, 468, 770, 341, 1446, 581, 603, 182, 102

5.3 Extent to which training results in qualifications, and which types

Employers were asked how much training offered to employees typically results in a qualification.

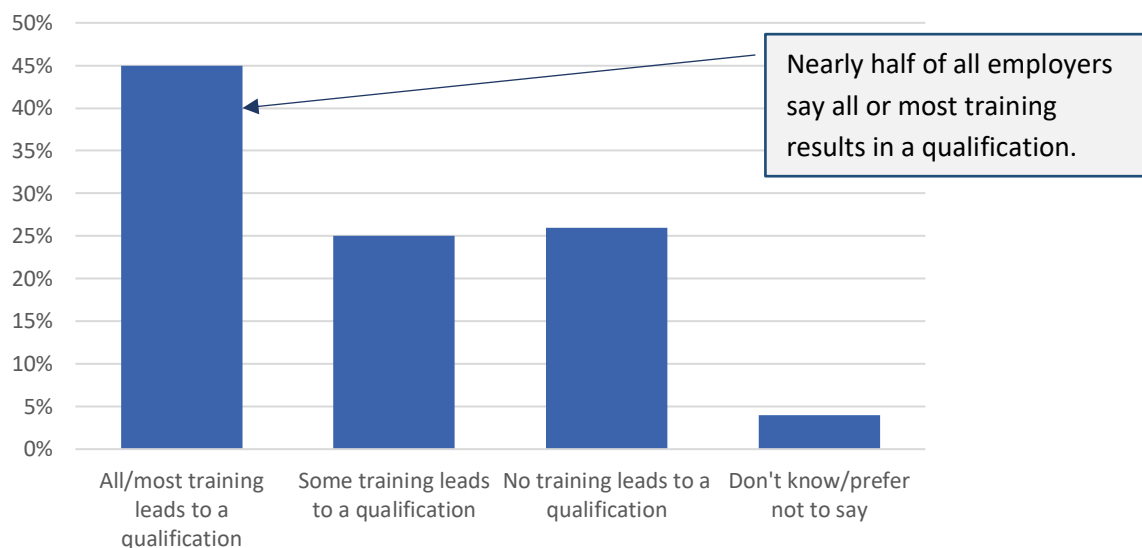
Figure 36: Extent to which training results in a qualification – professional and managerial roles



Base: 995

- A significantly larger proportion of large employers (49%) say all/most training results in a qualification, compared with micro businesses (32%).

Figure 37: Extent to which training results in a qualification – skilled and supervisory roles



Base: 1037

Perceptions of Vocational and Technical Qualifications

- A significantly larger proportion of large employers (51%) say all/most training results in a qualification, compared with micro businesses (39%).

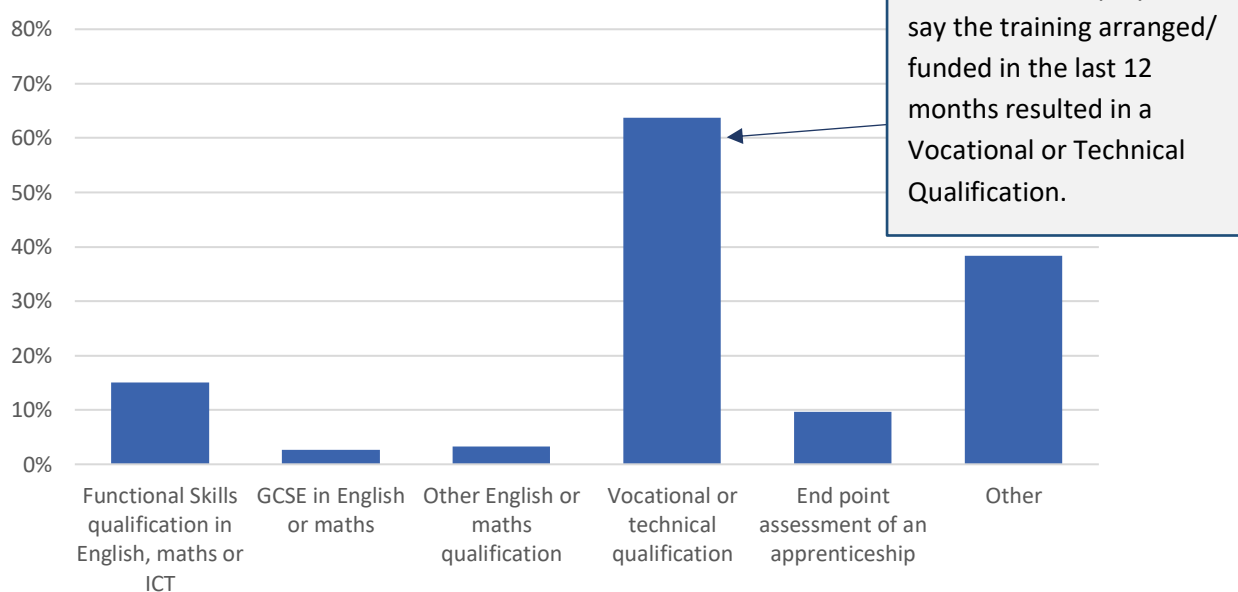
Figure 38: Extent to which training results in a qualification – entry and admin roles



Base: 1014

- A significantly larger proportion of large employers (47%) say all/most training results in a qualification, compared with micro businesses (33%).

Figure 39: Has any of the training arranged or funded in the last 12 months led to any of the following?



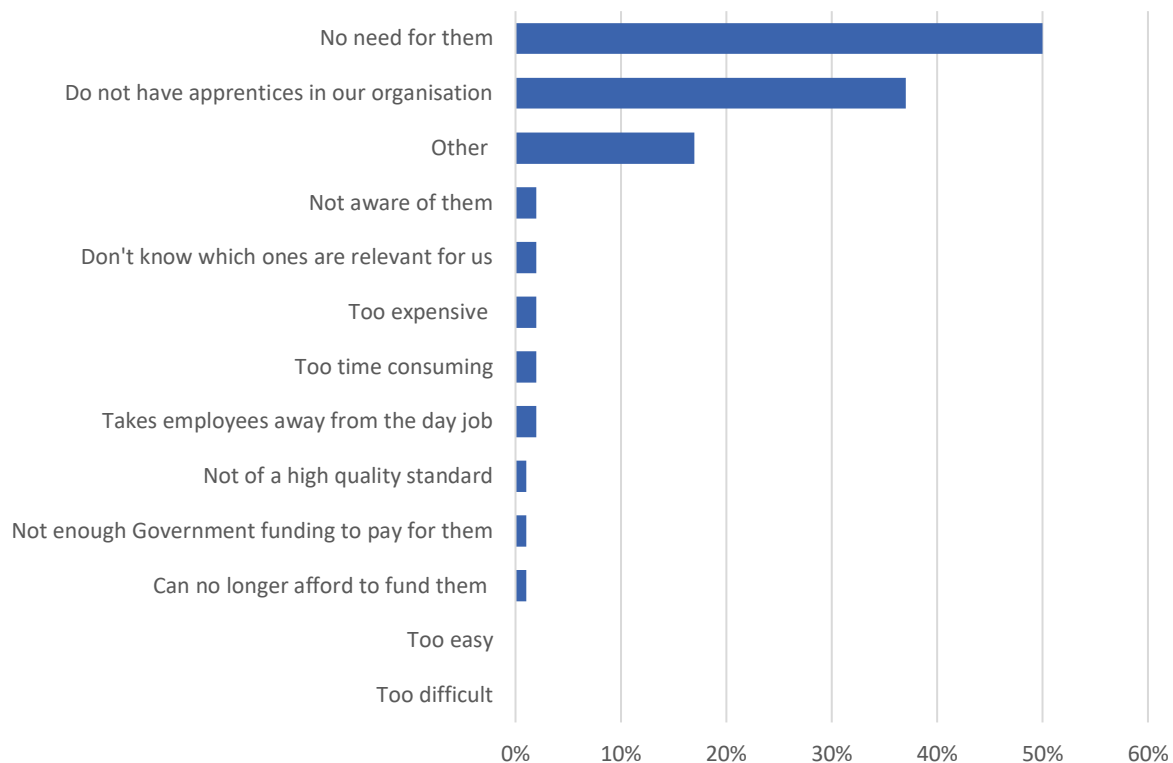
*Respondents could select more than one response

Base: 959

5.4 Reasons for not offering training resulting in other VTQs

Employers who said the training they had arranged or funded in the last 12 months had not resulted in a qualification, were asked the reasons for this (selecting from a list of options, more than one could be selected).

Figure 40: Why did the training offered not result in a qualification?



**Respondents could select more than one response*

Base: 913

- Of the employers who say they have no need for training that leads to a qualification, half say their employees do not need qualifications to do their jobs. Data from a follow up question found that a fifth of employers saying they have no need for training that leads to a qualification, recruit people with relevant qualifications, while 5% use some form of test to ascertain competence.

Nearly half of all micro employers say the training they offered did not result in a qualification because they have no need for qualifications, compared with 18% of large employers who said the same.

5.5 Factors taken into account when choosing qualifications to offer employees

Figure 41: Which of the following factors are taken into account when choosing the qualifications to offer your employees?



**Respondents could select more than one response*

Base: 1038