



Department
for Transport

High Speed Rail (London to West Midlands) Act 2017 Vocational Qualifications Report 1 April 2019 - 31 March 2020

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Presented to Parliament pursuant to High Speed Rail
(London - West Midlands) Act 2017



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1. Background

- 1.1 Skills, employment and education is one of the seven strategic objectives of the HS2 project and is critical in achieving our vision of HS2 being a 'catalyst for growth across Britain'. As part of this, the HS2 project is an opportunity to create new jobs and develop the technical skills to design and build HS2 and other UK infrastructure projects. It is also an opportunity to improve the delivery of the UK's future project pipeline and leave a lasting skills legacy for the country.
- 1.1 In this context, it is forecast that a third of the jobs supported within construction occupations during Phases One and 2a will require high levels of skills, defined as at least degree-level or equivalent (NVQ4+). Further information can be found in the HS2 Skills, Employment and Education Strategy report.¹
- 1.2 The annual Vocational Qualifications report helps us to understand how the workforce is being upskilled and how the aims outlined above are being achieved in Phase One, which is a key part of the wider HS2 project.
- 1.3 The High Speed Rail (London to West Midlands) Act 2017 ("the Act") provides authority for the construction of the high speed rail network between London Euston and Birmingham which is known as Phase One of the HS2 project. Creating opportunities for skills and employment is one of the seven strategic goals of the HS2 project, complementing its goal to be a 'catalyst for growth across the UK'.
- 1.4 Section 66(1) of the Act requires the Secretary of State to prepare a report on vocational qualifications obtained in each financial year in connection with HS2 construction, so that the project's contribution to skills development can be better understood.
- 1.5 This is the third annual report made under section 66 and it covers the period from 1 April 2019 until the end of the 19/20 financial year on 31 March 2020. The requirements of the report are threefold.
- 1.6 Section 66(2) of the Act requires this report to contain an account of vocational qualifications gained by individuals employed in constructing Phase One of HS2, in preparing for its construction and in connected and ancillary activities, and that they be broken down by type of qualification and activity.

¹ <https://www.hs2.org.uk/documents/hs2-skills-employment-and-education-strategy/>

- 1.7 Section 66(3) requires the report to contain an overall assessment of the costs of vocational training for relevant qualifications and by whom such costs were incurred.
- 1.8 This report covers Phase One of HS2. Vocational qualifications relating to future phases are covered within a separate report pursuant to section 2(3) of the High Speed Rail (Preparation) Act 2013.²
- 1.9 During the course of the period covered by this report, Phase One enabling works have continued, including site and vegetation clearance, utility works, ecological surveys and ground investigations. Main Works Civils Contracts remained largely focussed on design and development work during the period covered by this report, which ended just ahead of Notice to Proceed being granted in April 2020.

² <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2013/31/contents>

2. Vocational Qualifications

Apprenticeships

- 2.1 The Enabling Works Contract and the Main Work Civils Contract included a requirement for the provision of apprenticeship opportunities. Once these contract awards were made, the successful contractors began to take on apprentices in line with the contractual requirement.
- 2.2 For Enabling Works Contracts, the requirement is that at least 2.5 per cent of their workforces should be apprentices at any one time. The figure for Main Works Civils Contracts during the build stage is 4 per cent.
- 2.3 In the 17/18 Vocational Qualifications Report, it was reported that 94 apprenticeships were created and filled by HS2 Ltd and its contractors. This compares to 113 apprenticeships being created for the 18/19 reporting period.
- 2.4 In 19/20, the Enabling Works Contractors, on average, exceeded the contract requirement for 2.5% of their workforce to be apprentices. Main Work Civils Contractors have a requirement of 4% of their workforce to be apprentices from Stage 2 of their contract.
- 2.5 It is estimated that around 9,000 people were working on the HS2 project during the reporting period. The vast majority of these were employed by HS2 Ltd or its contractors and are covered in section 4 of this report. A small number worked for the Department for Transport and are covered separately, in this section, below.

The Department for Transport

- 2.6 A small proportion of those working on the HS2 project work at the Department for Transport. It is considered that the scope of this report applies to those working on Phase One of the project in the Department.
- 2.7 Two employees were identified as having undertaken vocational qualifications at the time of working on Phase One of the HS2 project.
- 2.8 One employee was part-time and undertook qualifications in project management.

- 2.9 The second employee was part-time and undertook two qualifications in data analysis.
- 2.10 It is important to note that this data is only in relation to learning provided centrally through Civil Service Learning. Therefore, it is possible that other vocational qualifications have been undertaken. However, learning undertaken through other providers or paid for through team budgets is not captured and therefore has not been included in this report.
- 2.11 In 18/19, one person was identified as having undertaken a vocational qualification. In light of the very low numbers, it has been decided not to collect such data for future reports. This reflects the different nature of the work and, consequently, the qualifications, undertaken by that of the Department to that of the HS2 workforce.

3. Data collection

Lessons learnt

- 3.1 For the first Annual Report on Vocational Qualifications (2017-18), data was collected centrally. For the second Annual Report (2018-19), an online survey was conducted. However, the response rate was lower than anticipated.
- 3.2 Therefore, for this Annual Report, HS2 Ltd worked with their supply chain partners to identify lessons learnt from the previous survey.
- 3.3 One of the key issues identified from the 18/19 survey was that HS2 Ltd did not have sight of what happened with the surveys after they were shared with the Tier 1 contractors. As part of this, HS2 Ltd conducted research with the contractors to inform the methodology for the 19/20 survey.
- 3.4 It was not clear from the data collection for 18/19 if the survey had reached the on-site workforce. However, planning for the 19/20 survey began before Covid-19 restrictions had been put in place. This had included speaking to site managers about the best approach for on-site staff participation in the survey.
- 3.5 To this end, site managers would have been asked whether paper forms were more accessible to those on site, rather than digital versions of the survey. A similar approach was used for Common Design Element engagement during early 2020, which also took place routewide across Phase One and thus set a precedent. As it was not possible to implement these measures for the 19/20 survey, they can be looked at again for the 20/21 survey, dependent upon Covid-19 restrictions.
- 3.6 It was decided that including a question in the 19/20 survey asking where respondents are based would help give a better understanding of where in the supply chain respondents were.
- 3.7 It was also identified that within HS2 Ltd, there was no internal process for managing information relating to which members of staff within HS2 Ltd had completed vocational qualifications.

- 3.8 Therefore, the 19/20 survey was shared within HS2 Ltd through internal communications, including an article on the intranet and a piece in the Manager's Monthly message.
- 3.9 Furthermore, there are plans within HS2 Ltd's Learning and Development team to set-up a steering group with the Tier 1 contractors. This will ensure that members of the steering group will be able to give their input on future surveys, as well as collate information throughout the year.

Conducting the survey

- 3.10 Based on the feedback received from the Tier 1 contractors, a more thorough communications process was used for the 19/20 survey.
- 3.11 An email was sent out by the Head of the HS2 Ltd Skills, Employment and Education (SEE) team to the SEE contacts at all of the Phase One Tier 1 contractors (including Engineering Delivery Partners). This email advised the contacts that the survey would be launching in two weeks and that they would also receive a detailed communications plan. The email provided suggestions of people that they may wish to talk to in relation to the survey to raise awareness (e.g. training co-ordinators and Learning and Development leads within the supply chain).
- 3.12 At the end of the week preceding the launch of the survey, the Tier 1 SEE leads were emailed with the link to the survey and were advised that it would be live from the start of the following week. This email also included a copy of the communications plan.
- 3.13 The Tier 1 SEE leads were asked to update their HS2 Skills Manager with whom the survey had been shared. This was to better understand how the survey had been shared and where it had reached within the supply chain.
- 3.14 Weekly updates were provided to HS2 Ltd from the Tier 1 SEE leads on how many responses had been submitted. The update also included information on whom the survey had been shared with.

4. Survey questions and results

- 4.1 The survey ran for 6 weeks. The HS2 workforce at the time the survey began was 9,109.
- 4.2 The target for representation of the workforce by the survey was to capture 910 responses.
- 4.3 The exercise resulted in 1,226 survey submissions, capturing 13.5% of the workforce.
- 4.4 Given that the survey took place during the Covid-19 restrictions and prevented some of the initial plans to reach more of the on-site work force from being implemented (see paragraphs 3.1-3.5), this was an encouraging response rate.
- 4.5 In total, nine questions in relation to vocational qualifications were asked. The survey structure is explained in further detail below. The full list of questions in the survey were:
 - Have you achieved a Vocational Qualification* whilst working on the HS2 contract between the 1st April 2019 and 31st March 2020? (*Vocational Qualification work-based awards achieved through assessment and training)
 - What sector do you work in?
 - Are you a full time or a part time employee?
 - Where do you mainly work?
 - What topic was your qualification in?
 - What level was this qualification?
 - Who paid for this qualification?
 - How much did the qualification cost?
 - Did you do another qualification between 1st April 2019 and 31st March 2020?

Question 1. Have you achieved a Vocational Qualification* whilst working on the HS2 contract between the 1st April 2019 and 31st March 2020? (*Vocational Qualification work-based awards achieved through assessment and training)

4.6

	Response total	Response percentage
Yes	180	15
No	1046	85

Survey conclusions - question 1

- 4.7 In order to improve data quality, only those who answered "yes" to this question were then able to proceed to the next stages of the survey.
- 4.8 Of the 1,226 respondents, 15% (180) completed a VQ while working on the HS2 project between 1st April 2019 and 31st March 2020.
- 4.9 No further data was collected from those who answered "no" to this question.
- 4.10 Since the overwhelming majority (85%) answered "no", this suggests more work needs to be done to target the survey at those who have undertaken a vocational qualification. However, the data collection methodology has increased the reliability of the data since the 18/19 survey.

Question 2. What sector do you work in?

4.11

	Response total
No answer	2
Other	10
Skilled trades occupations	28
Sales and customer service occupations	2
Professional occupations	70
Manager, directors and senior officials	48
Associate professional and technical occupations	19
Administrative and secretarial occupations	1
Total	180

Survey conclusions - question 2

4.12 The results for this question helped to inform some of the information we see in questions asked later in the survey.

4.13 The majority of respondents (70) work in a professional occupation, followed by 48 respondents in Managerial or Senior roles. This is in contrast to one person in an administrative and secretarial occupation.

4.14 Of the 118 respondents for these two sectors, 48 of them did not know what level qualification they had completed, 6 of them completed a Level 8 qualification and 20 completed a Level 7 qualification.

4.15 The third most selected category was skilled trades occupations, the majority of respondents who chose this category were based on-site.

Question 3. Are you a full time or a part time employee?

4.16

	Response total
Employed full time	152
Employed part time	2
Self employed	20
Other	6
Total	180

Survey conclusions - question 3

4.17 The majority of respondents (152) work full-time. This is in contrast to only two respondents working part-time.

4.18 Based on the responses to this question and question 4, the majority of those who are self-employed are based on-site.

Question 4. Where do you mainly work?

4.19

	Response total
On-site	67
Office based	96
Other	5
Other - combination of office and on-site	12
Total	180

Survey conclusions - question 4

4.20 This question was added to the 19/20 survey to help give a better understanding of the reach of the survey within the HS2 workforce.

4.21 As mentioned in section 3, there were plans to help improve the reach of the survey to the on-site workforce. However, due to Covid-19 restrictions it was not possible to implement these plans.

4.22 Even without these additional methods of dissemination, 37% of those who responded were based on-site.

4.23 Out of the 17 respondents that replied with “other”, 12 of them worked a combination of on-site and office based locations.

4.24 It is possible that the data gathered has been impacted by Covid-19 restrictions, with respondents having changed their typical working location and working pattern.

Question 5. What topic was your qualification in?

4.25

	Response total
Business / Finance	8
Construction	65
Engineering	34

Health and Safety	41
Plant	12
Project Management	40
Rail	2
Security	2
Transport/Logistics	5
No answer	11
Other	14
Total	234

Survey conclusions - question 5

4.26 For each qualification that a respondent referenced, they were asked what topic the qualification was in, rather than the specific name of the qualification.

4.27 The overall majority of respondents (65) answered that their vocational qualification was in construction. This was followed by Health and Safety (41) and Project Management (40).

4.28 It is anticipated that as the HS2 project progresses, there may be changes in which topics are most commonly chosen.

Question 6. What level was this qualification?

4.29

	Response total
Level 1	9
Level 2	24
Level 3	24
Level 4	15
Level 5	13
Level 6	23
Level 7	23
Level 8	8
Don't know	83
No answer	3
Total	225

Survey conclusions - question 6

- 4.30 Following feedback from the engagement undertaken with Tier 1 contractors as mentioned in section 3, the 19/20 survey included a link providing equivalency information for UK and EU qualifications, to help improve the respondents' understanding when answering this question.
- 4.31 The link provided to respondents around qualification level equivalencies was: <https://oxbridgehomelearning.uk/blog/eqfeuropean-qualifications/>
- 4.32 Despite being provided with information on qualification level equivalency, the majority of respondents (83) answered "Don't know" to this question. Therefore, the high proportion of uncertain responses limits the amount of understanding that can be drawn from this question.
- 4.33 Of those that did know what level their qualification was, most had either completed a Level 2 or 3 qualification at the lower end of the scale (24 each). At the higher end of the scale, respondents had either completed a Level 6 or 7 qualification (23 each).
- 4.34 As with the topic of the qualification, there may be a change in the levels of qualifications undertaken by the HS2 workforce as the project progresses.

Question 7. Who paid for this qualification?

4.35

	Response total
Self	39
My employer	176
Don't know	8
No answer	2
Total	225

Survey conclusions - question 7

- 4.36 The majority of qualifications reported in the survey were paid for by the respondent's employer (176).
- 4.37 This is in contrast to those respondents who paid for their own qualification (39).
- 4.38 When looking at the survey data more closely, we can see where respondents did not know what level qualification they had done at question 6 above, the employer had paid for 70 out of 83 of those qualifications.

Question 8. How much did the qualification cost?

4.39

	Response total
Up to £500	59
£501-£1000	37
£5001 or more	16
Don't know	57
Total	225

Survey conclusions - question 8

4.40 The majority of qualifications fell in the “up to £500” bracket for cost (59). The next most chosen option was “Don’t know” (57) followed by the “£1001 - £5000” bracket (53).

4.41 When analysing the data more closely, of the 57 qualifications where respondents did not know the cost, 48 of those were paid for by the employer.

4.42 The high numbers of those who responded "Don't know" limits the amount of understanding that can be drawn from the data. However, this could be due to the fact that the majority of the qualifications were paid for by the employer.

Question 9. Did you do another qualification between 1st April 2019 and 31st March 2020?

4.43

	Response total
Yes	34
No	146
Total	180

Survey conclusions - question 9

4.44 If respondents answered "yes" to this question, they were immediately taken to question 5 of the survey, "What topic was your qualification in?", proceeding through the questions until they came back to question 9.

4.45 Although respondents were not specifically asked on the number of qualifications they had completed, this was calculated through the responses provided.

4.46 The majority of those who responded completed only one vocational qualification (145).

4.47 Two respondents completed more than four qualifications (the maximum number of qualifications that a respondent could provide a response for in the survey). Both respondents were based on-site and worked in a skilled trade occupation. One of these respondents completed all Level 1 qualifications, whilst the other completed all Level 5 qualifications.

5. Overall conclusions and next steps

- 5.1 By upskilling the workforce, the HS2 project is meeting its aims of making sure that the right skills are in place to deliver the railway. For example, the largest majority of vocational qualifications were in construction (65) followed by Health and Safety (41). Promoting vocational qualifications ensures that the demand for high skilled labour is met over the course of the HS2 programme, and contributes to providing high quality and long-term employment opportunities. This report demonstrates how vocational qualifications are a key tool in the creation of a skilled construction and transport workforce for the HS2 project and beyond.
- 5.2 As stated in the 18/19 report, capturing data from such a dispersed and large infrastructure project as the HS2 project presents challenges. These were addressed by working with the Tier 1 contractors as discussed in section 3.
- 5.3 It is also recognised that Covid-19 restrictions likely affected the overall response rate. However, it is promising that for the 19/20 survey, the target survey completion rate of a 10% representation of the HS2 workforce was over-achieved. This was whilst also dealing with the impact of Covid-19 restrictions.
- 5.4 If Covid-19 restrictions are lifted when the next annual survey takes place for the 20/21 report and the additional measures which were proposed for 19/20 (paragraphs 3.1-3.5) are put in place, a further increase in the level of responses is expected.
- 5.5 Measures are already being looked at to further improve data quality for the 20/21 survey (paragraph 3.9). However, due to the high levels of respondents replying with “Don’t know” to many of the questions, additional information / explanation may need to be put into place.
- 5.6 The most common vocational qualifications were in construction, health and safety and project management. This compares to last year’s results, where the most common topics were in engineering, business/finance and construction.
- 5.7 The total estimated cost of all of these vocational qualifications is between £150,000 and £410,000. This compares to last year’s estimated cost of £100,000 and £200,000, a cost largely met by employers. As with the 18/19 report, it is likely that the estimated costs for the 19/20 data are an underestimate due to the high

proportion of "Don't know" to question 8, as well as the upper bound of courses costing £5001 or more, which 16 respondents selected.

- 5.8 As with the 18/19 survey, the low response rate may be due to the likelihood that those who did achieve a vocational qualification in the reporting period are more likely to have elected to respond to the survey. It is also important to reiterate that the HS2 project is still in its infancy and that as the project progresses, it is anticipated that there will be an increase in vocational qualifications achieved. Another important point to reiterate since the last survey is that the level of vocational qualifications being achieved needs to be considered in the context of an already highly qualified HS2 workforce.
- 5.9 Maintaining a high level of apprenticeships in connection with HS2 construction will continue to be a key commitment of the project which will help to ensure a pipeline of highly qualified staff. As noted in paragraphs 2.3-2.4, the increase in the creation of apprenticeships from 94 in 17-18; 113 in 18-19; and the Enabling Works Contractors, on average, exceeding the contract requirement for 2.5% of their workforce to be apprentices in 19-20, is a positive indicator of this commitment.
- 5.10 This survey had improved data collection methods by making it possible for respondents to submit details if they have undertaken more than one vocational qualification during the reporting period. Another improvement was to ensure that an individual who has not completed a vocational qualification will not be required to go through the whole survey,
- 5.11 Additionally, a communication plan was established to ensure systematic communication with the supply chain to be clear what they are required to do to ensure the survey details are widely circulated.
- 5.12 We will also aim to provide data that covers the pipeline for vocational qualifications, as an indicator of future vocational qualification take up.
- 5.13 As stated in the 18/19 report, we anticipate that substantial improvements to data collection are likely to be limited until at least the 2020/21 report. However, this depends significantly on the impact of any Covid-19 restrictions.

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