



Department
for Transport

High Speed Rail Vocational Qualifications Report 1 April 2021 - 31 March 2022

March 2023

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Presented to Parliament pursuant to Section 66(1) of the
High Speed Rail (London – West Midlands) Act 2017

March 2023



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1. Background

- 1.1 Creating opportunities for skills and employment is one of the seven strategic goals of the HS2 project, complementing its main purpose to be a 'catalyst for growth across the UK'. HS2 also represents an opportunity to improve the delivery of the UK's future project delivery pipeline by leaving a lasting skills legacy for the country.
- 1.2 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 HS2 Ltd.'s Skills, Employment and Education Strategy report.¹
- 1.3 The annual Vocational Qualifications (VQ) report helps us to understand how the workforce is being upskilled and how the aims outlined above are being achieved across the programme.
- 1.4 The High Speed Rail (London to West Midlands) Act 2017 ("the Act") provides authority for the construction of a High Speed rail network between London Euston and Birmingham (known as Phase One of the HS2 project).
- 1.5 Section 66(1) of the Act stipulates that the Secretary of State must prepare a report on VQs obtained in each financial year in connection with the construction of the Phase.
- 1.6 Section 66(2) of the Act requires this report to contain an account of VQs 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.
- 1.7 Section 66(3) requires the report to contain an overall assessment of the costs of training for VQs and who paid.
- 1.8 This is the fifth annual VQ report made under the vires of the Act and it covers the period between 1 April 2021 and 31 March 2022. This report also covers VQs associated with Phases 2a and 2b, which technically fall under the requirements of the High-Speed Rail (Preparation) Act 2013 ("the Preparation Act"). For reporting purposes, however, and in compliance with the VQ requirements of the Preparation Act, they are included in this VQ report.
- 1.9 The research results set out in this report were sourced from HS2 Ltd, who distributed a survey to workers on all three Phases of the HS2 route, within HS2 Ltd,

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

Tier 1 contractors and the wider supply chain. The survey responses were collated and analysed, and inform the findings of this report.

2. Data Collection

2.1 2022 Survey Key Facts

- 2.1.1 The time period covered by the survey is 1st April 2021 – 31 March 2022.
- 2.1.2 There were 9 questions, and the survey was expected to take no more than 5 minutes to complete.
- 2.1.3 The 2021 survey questions were reviewed, it was agreed that the questions would remain the same for 2022, to provide continuity and the possibility for comparison to be made between the surveys.
- 2.1.4 The survey was open for 6 weeks. It launched on Wednesday 8th June 2022 and closed on Wednesday 20th July 2022.
- 2.1.5 This was different from previous years where the survey was open for 4 weeks initially and then extended for a further 2 weeks to boost responses.
- 2.1.6 The survey could be completed online, accessed via a URL link or QR Code.

2.2 Tier 1 dissemination process

- 2.2.1 The focus for 2022 was to improve the dissemination process by increasing the channels through which the survey was promoted and to focus on promoting the survey to site-based staff as there was a lower than anticipated response rate from this group in 2021.
- 2.2.2 A survey launch meeting was organised before the survey opened where all Skills Employment and Education (SEE) Coordinators within the Tier 1 Joint Ventures (JVs) and their communications teams were invited to discuss the content of the survey. The proposed survey was shared for comment, the importance of the survey was explained, and a detailed communications plan was issued.
- 2.2.3 The communications plan included suggested dates for communications and reminders to be sent out, email templates, an internal communications article and a QR code flyer.

- 2.2.4 The QR code flyer was an improvement on the 2021 survey when Covid 19 restriction prevented this. The flyer contained a QR code and direct link to the survey that could be printed and placed in site locations. This was to allow site teams easier access to the survey from their own mobile devices, removing the need to share PCs with Site Managers.
- 2.2.5 SEE Coordinators were encouraged to make Site Managers aware so this could be shared with operatives during toolbox talks.

2.3 Internal HS2 dissemination process

- 2.3.1 To ensure that information regarding the survey was shared internally within HS2 Ltd, the company's internal communication teams created a communications plan.
- 2.3.2 Several articles were posted on the HS2 Ltd internal intranet, including reminder and final reminder articles. The information was sent out by email on the internal newsletter with the QR code flyer.
- 2.3.3 HS2 Ltd shared the survey with all its employee networks such as the REACH, Gender Balance Networks and Early Careers Networks who shared the link directly with members.

3. Survey questions and results

- 3.1 The total HS2 workforce at the time the survey was initiated was estimated at around 24,800 FTE. The target for representation of the workforce by the survey was to capture 2,481 responses or 10%.
- 3.2 The survey lasted six weeks and resulted in 1,441 submissions, capturing 5.8% of the workforce. This compared to 1,449 responses from this group last year (8.75%). We will consider how to improve response rates for next year's report given this reduction in the number of responses received.
- 3.3 In total, nine questions in relation to VQs were asked. The survey structure is explained in further detail below. The full list of questions in the survey were:
- Which category best describes your occupation?
 - Did you complete a relevant VQ?
 - On what basis are you employed on the HS2 Project?
 - Where did you mainly work between the 1st April 2021 and 31st March 2022?
 - Which Phase of the HS2 Project are you working on?
 - What topic was your qualification in?
 - What level was the qualification?
 - Who paid?
 - How much did it cost?

Question 1. What category best describes your occupation?

- 3.4 699 (48.6%) respondents who completed a VQ worked in Manager, Director, Senior Roles or Engineering roles.
- 3.5 364 (25.3%) respondents were working in a Professional Occupation.
- 3.6 94 (1.7%) respondents were Onsite Construction Operatives, Plant Operatives, Labourers, and Transport Operatives.
- 3.7 The results show that most of those who completed VQs were already working in senior or highly skilled roles.

3.8 QR code posters online made it simpler for those onsite to respond to the survey using mobile devices. The survey was also communicated to site staff by their supervisors and in HS2 Ltd’s onsite newsletter.

Occupation	Total	%
Engineering (includes Civils	399	27.8
Professional occupations	364	25.3
Manager, Director and Senior Officials	300	20.9
Associate professional and technical occupations	149	10.4
Administrative and secretarial occupations	91	6.3
Plant Operatives	41	2.9
Engagement and Customer Service	37	2.6
Labourers and transport	29	2.0
Onsite Constructive Operatives	24	1.7
Not Answered	3	<1

Table 1 What category best describes your occupation?

Question 2. Did you complete a relevant VQ?

3.9 Of the 1,441 respondents, 165 (11.5%) people completed a VQ while working on the HS2 project between 1st April 2021 and 31st March 2022.

3.10 If a respondent answered “no” to this question they were taken to the end of the survey and no further information was collected from them.

	Response total	Response percentage
Yes	165	11.5%
No	1276	88.5%

Table 2 Did you complete a relevant VQ?

Question 3. On what basis are you employed on the HS2 Project?

3.11 The majority of the respondents, 158 (88.8%) were employed.

3.12 16 respondents (9.3%) were self-employed.

3.13 Four (2.2%) respondents did not answer.

	Response total	Response total %
Employed	158	88.8
Self employed	16	9.03
Not Answered	4	2.23

Table 3 On what basis are you employed on the HS2 Project?

Question 4. Where did you mainly work between the 1st April 2021 and 31st March 2022

- 3.14 It was found that 43 responses said they were mainly working on site and 40 responses said they were office based. This is expected to increase as more people return to office working and onsite in a post pandemic world.
- 3.15 Previously in the 2021 VQ survey, the most popular answer chosen for this question was home based working.
- 3.16 26 respondents (14.6%) were home based, and 59 respondents (33.1%) worked in a combination of on-site and office based. This would have been increased by the number of staff whose working locations were altered during the pandemic.

	Response total	%
Home based	26	14.6
On-site	43	24.2
Combination office based/on-site	59	33.1
Office based	40	22.5
Other	10	5.6

Table 4 Where did you mainly work between 1st April 2021 and 31st March 2022

Question 5. Which Phase of the HS2 Project are you working on?

- 3.17 This question was added to the survey for 2021 so that we could better understand the distribution of those completing VQs across the line of route. This question was supported by a map of the route with a key to clearly indicate where each phase was located.
- 3.18 The majority of those who responded worked on Phase One (110 respondents).
- 3.19 There were twelve respondents who worked on Phase 2b, 24 worked on Phase 2a and 32 worked route wide.

	Response total	%
Phase One – London to West Midlands (Fradley)	110	61.8

	Response total	%
Route-wide	32	18
Phase 2a – West Midlands (Fradley) to Crewe	24	13.5
Phase 2b – Crewe to Manchester or West Midlands to Leeds	12	6.7

Table 5 Which Phase of the HS2 Project are you working on?

Question 6. What topic was your qualification in?

3.20 For each qualification that a respondent completed they were asked what topic the qualification was in.

3.21 The most frequently chosen topic was Engineering (44 responses). Followed by Construction (42), Project Management (35), Health and Safety (24), Business/Finance (20), Other (18), Plant (13), Transport/ Traffic and logistics (11), Rail (6) and Security (3).

3.22 The response for this question correlates with the stage of the project since most of the activity is taking place on Phase One.

	Response total	%
Engineering	44	20.4
Project Management	35	16.2
Construction	42	19.4
Health and Safety	24	11.1
Other	18	8.3
Business and Finance	20	9.3
Transport/Traffic and Logistics	11	5.1
Plant	13	6.0
Rail	6	2.8
Security	3	1.4

Table 6 What topic was your qualification in?

Question 7. What level was the qualification?

3.23 Based on feedback from the Tier 1 suppliers, we included equivalency information for UK and EU qualifications, to help improve the respondents' understanding when answering this question.

3.24 However, despite this additional measure, 35.1% did not know the level of qualification that they completed.

3.25 From those that did know what level their qualification was, we can see that most respondents either completed a Level 3 or 7 qualification.

3.26 It is expected that as the project progresses a change in the levels of qualifications undertaken may be evident, as more entry level jobs come through the supply chain.

	Response total	%
Level 1	22	10.6
Level 2	14	6.7
Level 3	24	11.5
Level 4	16	7.7
Level 5	16	7.7
Level 6	19	9.1
Level 7	24	11.5
Don't know	73	35.1

Table 7 What level was the qualification?

Question 8. Who paid for the qualification?

3.27 As you can see in Table 8, 146 respondents (69.5%) reported in the survey that their employer paid for the qualification.

3.28 Only 56 of the respondents (26.7%) paid for their own qualifications.

3.29 The response to this question shows that in most circumstances the employer paid for the qualification, which confirms that during this time the project offered employees opportunities to do a VQ at no cost to themselves.

	Response total	%
My employer paid	146	69.5
I paid	56	26.7
Don't know	8	3.8

Table 8 Who paid for the qualification?

Question 9. How much did it cost?

3.30 The most chosen option was 'don't know' with 77 responses, which is possibly because they did not pay for the qualification themselves. Where the answer was known, most qualifications completed fell in the '£1001-£5000' bracket, followed by 24 instances in the 'Up to £500' bracket.

	Response total	%
Don't know	88	44.4
£1001-£5000	32	16.2
Up to £500	37	18.7

	Response total	%
£501-£1000	26	13.1
£5001 or more (please specify)	15	7.6

Table 9 How much did it cost?

4. Overall conclusions and next steps

4.1 Of those responding to the survey, 165 people (11.5%) had undertaken a VQ within the reporting period. The equivalent result for last year's survey was 183 people (13%).

4.2 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, most VQs were in Engineering 20.4% followed by Construction (19.4%). Last year the most VQs were in Construction (23%) followed by Engineering (16%). Promoting VQs 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 VQs are a key tool in the creation of a skilled construction and transport workforce for the HS2 project and beyond.

4.3 The total estimated cost of all the VQs reported in this survey is between £122,000 and £355,000. This compares broadly to last year's estimated cost of between £120,500 and £270,000 and the previous year's cost of between £150,000 and £410,000. In each case, the cost was largely met by employers. As with previous reports, it is likely that the estimated costs for the 2021/2022 data are an underestimate due to the high proportion of "Don't know" to question 9. There is also uncertainty about the cost of courses in the upper band of £5,001 or more, which 15 respondents selected.

4.4 It should also be noted that these survey results only capture a small proportion (5.8%) of the overall workforce of the project. For illustrative purposes only, if this sample were representative of the overall workforce in terms of VQs (something which cannot be verified) the total number of people undertaking VQs would rise to 2,845 and the total cost of VQs on the project would increase to between £2,103,280 and £6,120,200.

The survey process

4.5 Due to the broad and complex nature of the HS2 supply chain, the use of a survey is still judged to be the most effective way of gauging the level of VQs on the HS2 project. However, survey results will be informed and limited by the coverage and response rate.

4.6 There were 1,441 completed responses to the survey of which 165 survey responses said they had completed an NVQ. Eight respondents reported completing more than 1 NVQ.

4.7 The 2022 survey ran for 6 weeks, and this was communicated at the beginning of the survey. In previous years the survey has been advertised as open for 4 weeks initially and has then been extended for a further 2 weeks, this has previously captured an influx of last-minute responses, this year's approach may have been a driver in the slight reduction in the number of responses received compared to last year.

4.8 For the 2022 survey there was more proactive engagement carried out with onsite staff and those at an operational level than in previous surveys. 94 responses were received from Onsite Construction Operatives, Plant Operatives Labourers and Transport operatives, which was 30 more than in the previous year's survey.

4.9 However, most of the responses still came from those at senior levels. While it's difficult to say why this is, it is possible that historically there is greater familiarity with the survey from previous years among these groups. In addition, within the supply chain and in many site-based roles, there is a higher staff turnover as staff are employed by agency and construction labour desks and often move around the supply chain. This presents two difficulties given that the survey only captures a snapshot in time. Operatives spending less time in the same role presents less opportunity to complete an NVQ and those who had completed NVQs may now have moved to other sites or contracts.

4.10 The focus of this survey is on NVQs but this is not the full breadth of training that takes place on the HS2 Project. Many other training courses have been completed which will not have been captured in this data.

4.11 As the supply chain grows, those working on the project become further removed from HS2 Ltd and its Tier 1 JV's. This means it becomes more difficult to influence the dissemination of the survey, which results in fewer responses from Tier 2's and below, despite the supply chain making up the vast majority of the HS2 Project's workforce.

4.12 Measures are already being looked at to further improve data quality for the next annual survey. 1

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