Department for Transport

High Speed Rail Vocational Qualifications Report 1 April 2024 – 31 March 2025

November 2026

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

November 2026

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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 The annual Vocational Qualifications (VQ) report helps us to understand how the workforce is being upskilled via VQs, which is just one of the ways in which the aims outlined above are being achieved. Across the programme there are many other types of training taking place, such as apprenticeships and short construction courses.

1.3 The High-Speed Rail (London to West Midlands) Act 2017 ("the Act") provides authorisation for the construction of the High-Speed rail network between London Euston and Birmingham city centre and a connection to the West Coast Mainline (at Handsacre in Staffordshire).

1.4 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 HS2 construction.

1.5 Section 66(2) of the Act requires this report to contain an account of VQs gained by individuals employed in constructing HS2, in preparing for its construction and in connected and ancillary activities, and that they be broken down by type of qualification and activity.

1.6 Section 66(3) requires the report to contain an overall assessment of the costs of training for VQs and who paid.

1.7 This is the eighth annual VQ report made under the requirements of the Act and it covers the period between 1 April 2024 and 31 March 2025. This report also covers VQs obtained through the former HS2 Phase 2a (West Midlands to Crewe), which was cancelled in October 2023, but still requires HS2 workers for close down activities. Although these phases technically fall under the requirements of the High-Speed Rail (Preparation) Act 2013 ("the Preparation Act"), for reporting purposes, and in compliance with the VQ requirements of the Preparation Act, they are included in this VQ report.

1.8 The results set out in this report were sourced from HS2 Ltd. Instead of distributing surveys to workers as in previous reports, HS2 Ltd instead has expanded the use of labour desks for collecting the relevant information, these are subcontractors to HS2 Ltd's tier one contractors. This is a more efficient method for collating the relevant data and saves time and resources. The labour desks collected information on their people working on HS2. This information was then collated and analysed to inform the findings of this report.

2. Data Collection

Labour desks return process

2.1 The time period covered for this report is 1st April 2024 – 31 March 2025.

2.2 HS2 Ltd discontinued the survey used for recent reports and instead expanded upon the approach of contacting the Main Works contractors' labour desks directly to request the data they held on completed VQs. Seven labour desks were contacted.

2.3 An email was sent to these labour desks to explain the request, purpose, and context. A meeting was also offered to labour desk representatives to discuss any queries they had. Responses from the labour desks were received by April 2026. The 10 questions from the previous 2024 report were reviewed and it was agreed that the questions would remain the same for 2025, save for some small changes to reflect that labour desks were collecting the necessary information. This would provide continuity and to aid comparison between the reports.

3. Labour desks – questions and results

Responses

3.1 HS2 Ltd received responses from the seven labour desks. These labour desks reported 284 out of 2,979 workers completed VQs and that 784 VQs in total were completed, within the reporting period for 2024/25. 148 people were found to have completed more than one VQ in the reporting period and the total number of VQs completed is a significant increase compared to the previous year's report which identified 347 completed VQs in the 2023/24 period. This is likely as a result of more data received from expanding the use of the labour desks and due to more people completing more than one VQ.

Labour desk Questions

3.2 The questions put to the labour desks were essentially as follows (slightly abridged below to avoid repetition):

- Which category best describes your employee's occupation?
- Has your employee completed a VQ whilst working on the HS2 contract?
- On what basis are your employees employed on the HS2 Project?
- Where did you employees mainly work between the 1st April 2024 and 31st March 2025?
- Please select which Phase of the HS2 Project your employee is working on?
- What topic was your employee's qualification in?
- What level was this qualification?
- Who paid for this qualification?
- How much did the qualification cost?
- How many people completed more than 1 NVQ between 1st April 2024 and 31st March 2025?

3.3 Data on these questions was provided by the labour desks. The results are described below under each question heading.

Question 1. Which category best describes your employee's occupation?

3.4 The results set out in table 1 below show that of the 2,979 people identified by the labour desks, the majority worked as onsite construction operatives (75.9%) followed by plant operatives (12.4%) and labourer and transport operatives (5.9%). This covers the large majority of the total.

3.5 The remaining people worked as manager, director and senior officials (1%), engineering (including civils) (0.4%), 1 person in administrative and secretarial and 132 in 'other' occupations (4.4%).

Occupation	Total	%
Administrative and secretarial occupations	1	0%
Manager, Director and Senior Officials	29	1%
Onsite Construction Operatives	2,260	75.9%
Plant Operatives	370	12.4%
Labourers and transport Operatives	176	5.9%
Engineering (includes Civils)	11	0.4%
Others	132	4.4%

Table 1. What category best describes your occupation?

Question 2 Has your employee completed a relevant VQ whilst working on the HS2 contract?

3.6 The labour desk confirmed that 284 people had completed a 'relevant' VQ (i.e. one obtained while working on the HS2 project between 1st April 2024 and 31st March 2025).

3.7 The 284 people completing a VQ represents 9.5% of the total 2,979 people employed by the labour desk.

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

3.8 The labour desks confirmed that all the people that completed NVQ qualifications were directly employed by them and working on the HS2 project. They reported no self-employed people included in the data. The labour desks are subcontractors to HS2 Ltd's tier one contractors.

	Response total	%
Employed	284	100%

Table 2. On what basis are you employed on the HS2 Project?

Question 4. Where did your employees mainly work between the 1st April 2024 and 31st March 2025

3.9 The labour desk found that the vast majority of those receiving qualifications worked on site (99.3%) with a small amount office based (0.7%). This no doubt reflects the stage of the project and scale of construction.

3.10 Compared to previous reports, there was an increase in the amount of people receiving qualifications who were based on-site (an increase of 23 percentage points) and a reduction in those office based (a reduction of 10.2 percentage points) and none who were home based.

	Response total	%
On-site	282	99.3%
Office-based	2	0.7%

Table 3. Where did you mainly work between 1st April 2024 and 31st March 2025?

Question 5. Please Select which Phase of the HS2 Project your employee is working on?

3.11 This question is included in the report to better understand the distribution of those completing VQs along the line of route.

3.12 It is important to note that the Government's decision to cancel Phases 2a (West Midlands to Crewe) and 2b (Crewe to Manchester or West Midlands to Leeds) was announced on 4 October 2023, in the previous reporting period. However, work is still taking place on the close down activities for these routes.

3.13 The labour desk found that the majority of those receiving qualifications worked on Phase One of HS2 (London to the West Midlands) (79.9%), and the rest on Phase 2a of HS2 (West Midlands to Crewe) (20.1%).

	Response total	%
Route-wide	0	0%
Phase 2a – West Midlands (Fradley) to Crewe	57	20.1%
Phase One – London to West Midlands (Fradley)	227	79.9%

Table 4. Which Phase of the HS2 Project are you working on?

Question 6. What topic was your employee's qualification in?

3.14 The labour desk collected data on what topics the completed qualifications were in.

3.15 By far the most frequently chosen topic was construction (69.5%), followed by plant (29.3%) and a small number of project management qualifications (1.1%).

	Response total	%
Construction	545	69.5%
Plant	230	29.3%

Project Management	9	1.1%
Total	784	100%

Table 5. What Topic was your qualification in?

Question 7. What level was the qualification?

3.16 The labour desk found that the two most common level of qualifications gained were 492 level 2 qualifications (63.5%) and 217 level 3 qualifications (27.7%). Next, were 37 level 4 qualifications (4.7%) and then 30 level 6 qualifications (3.8%).

	Response total	%
Level 1	0	0%
Level 2	498	63.5%
Level 3	217	27.7%
Level 4	37	4.7%
Level 5	1	0.1%
Level 6	30	3.8%
Level 7	1	0.1%

Table 6. What level was this qualification?

Question 8. Who paid for the qualification?

3.17 As set out in the table below, all but one qualification was paid for by the employer. It was unknown who paid for one of the qualifications.

3.18 The response to this question shows that the employer paid for the qualifications, which confirms that during this time the project offered employees opportunities to do a VQ at no cost to themselves. These results were similar to those of the previous year.

	Response total	%
My employer paid	783	99.9%
Don't know	1	0.1%

Table 7. Who paid for the qualification?

Question 9. How much did the qualification cost?

3.19 The labour desk data found that of the 784 qualifications undertaken, 659 (84.1%) cost up to £500, 82 (10.5%) cost between £501-£1000 and 42 (5.4%) cost between £1001-£5000. There was one qualification (0.1%) where the costs were unknown.

	Response total	%
Don't know	1	0.1%
Up to £500	659	84.1%
£501-£1000	82	10.5%
£1001-£5000	42	5.4%
£5001 or more	0	0%

Table 8. How much did it cost?

Question 10. How many people completed more than 1 NVQ between 1st April 2024 and 31st March 2025?

3.20 The results from the labour desk found that 148 people were found to have completed more than one VQ in the reporting year.

	Response total	%
Yes	148	100%

Table 9. How many people completed more than 1 NVQ between 1st April 2024 and 31st March 2025

4. Overall conclusions and next steps

4.1 Within the 2,979 workers detailed by the labour desks, 284 people had completed VQs in 2024/25. This represents a small increase over the previous year, 2023/24 which had 273 people with completed VQs. However, the 784 VQs completed in 2024/25 is a substantial increase over the previous year which had 347 completed VQs. We understand this is due to the increased number of labour desks providing data and one labour desk allowing employees to take multiple NVQs at the same time based on an agreement with the training provider.

4.2 79.9% of the 284 workers completing VQs worked on Phase One of HS2 (the most progressed phase of the route), and 20.1% on Phase 2a. This is similar to the previous report which identified that the majority of people (76.4%) obtaining VQs worked on Phase One of the route.

4.3 Given the data for this report came from labour desks, all the people achieving VQs were employed by an organisation (rather than self-employed or other). The vast majority of people (99.3%) were mainly working on site, a nearly four percentage point increase compared to the previous year.

4.4 The most popular VQs were in construction (69.5%), followed by plant (29.3%). Nearly two thirds (63.5%) of qualifications were at Level 2 and over a quarter (27.7%) were at Level 3.

4.5 The vast majority of responses (99.9%) reported that the employer paid for the qualification. The responses showed that 84.1% of qualifications cost up to £500, 10.5% cost between £501-£1000 and 5.4% cost between £1001-£5000. There was one qualification for which the cost was unknown.

4.6 The total estimated cost of all the VQs included in this report is between £149,124 and £626,500 which is a wider range than in previous years. The report from the previous year had an estimated cost of between £159,543 and £431,031. The figures in this report reflects the increase in the number of qualifications reported compared to the previous year (784 compared to 347 previously) and an increase in the number of qualifications taken at the lowest cost level, i.e. those between £0-£500. There were also no qualifications costing more than £5,000, unlike the previous year. The cost for the qualifications was met by employers, save for one qualification which was unknown.

4.7 As with previous reports, it is possible that these figures are underestimates for a few reasons. First, there are likely to have been some VQs that are not recorded in the labour desk returns, given the number of returns is only a subset of the very large workforce on HS2.

4.8 Furthermore, the ranges reflect some uncertainty, particularly with regard to the cost of the qualifications within the ranges. We have assumed £100 for the bottom of the lowest range and £1,001 for the high end (which may be an underestimate).

4.9 The expanded use of labour desks for VQ information has helped us to capture a higher number of VQ completions with less resource and impact on the workforce. The data has also helped to lower the proportion of “don’t know” responses, enabling us to capture clearer data. We will therefore aim to continue building further on the labour desk data in future years.

4.10 The focus of this report, as required by the relevant Acts, is on VQs, but this is far from the full breadth of training that takes place on the HS2 project. Many other training courses and skills development programmes have been completed which will not have been captured in this data. As noted above, it should also be recognised that these results only capture a proportion of the overall workforce of the project.

4.11 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. 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.

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