

Segment Two

Sector: Digital

Executive summary:

Deepening the understanding of SME needs and demands for training provision

The purpose of this Executive Summary is to provide a short summary highlighting the outcome of engagement with SMEs, training providers, partners and stakeholders to assess whether the provision identified in Segment One is meeting industry needs.

The full Segment Two report for Let's Talk Real Skills will facilitate and deepen the understanding of SME needs and demands for training provision by utilising intelligence gathered in the Phase One.

This report provides an assessment of Leeds City Region's skills needs, based on detailed analysis and discussion's with SMEs and detailed research and further discussions with sector groups, industry bodies and partners. As well as providing an evidence base for the needs of the digital sector it can be used to inform the development of pilot projects and pathways for the purposes of the Let's Talk Real Skills project.

In terms of the future anticipation of digital skills, forecasts show that technological trends in the sector will generate a heightened demand for individuals with specialised knowledge in mobile and cloud computing, cyber security, social media and big data. Recent Department for Digital, Culture, Media & Sport DCMS research also explore the prolific and widespread skills gaps the negatively affect the UKs productivity and growth potential, specifically around intellectual property and data analysis.

Moving to a more local level, in 2019 the Leeds City Region Digital Board was established to oversee the delivery and implementation of the five outcomes of the Digital Framework:

- Digital opportunities for all businesses
- Digital skills for all
- A thriving digital sector
- World class digital infrastructure
- Tech for good

The ambition is for the board to oversee all digital activity in Leeds City Region and make connections between the different strands. Membership is drawn from across the city region and across the five outcomes.

As part of the devolution agreement, Government have committed to establishing a Digital Skills Partnership in West Yorkshire.

LDSPs have been established in 7 LEP areas to tackle local digital skills challenges. The objective of the LDSP is to bring together key stakeholders involved in digital skills (both supply and demand) to work to identify digital skills needs, barriers and identify opportunities for interventions.

The LDSP for West Yorkshire is closely aligned to the Let's Talk Real Skills, Collaborative Skills Partnership, (CSP) and the LDSP SME subgroup, (SME digital inclusion work stream), suggests pilot project ideas for LTRS to be taken forward.

The LDSP focuses on digital skills shortages in any and all sectors across West Yorkshire, thereby addressing the DF outcomes of Digital opportunities for all businesses and Digital Skills for all.

The Collaborative Skills Partnership focuses on digital skills shortages within the digital sector itself, thereby addressing the DF outcomes of “A thriving digital sector and digital skills for all”.

The LDSP focus is on essential digital skills for the workplace and beyond, including digital apprenticeships and higher level skills, whereas the CSP will focus mainly on piloting new ideas and pathways to help upskill employees working in technical and non-technical roles within the digital sector. Common skills gaps identified by both partnerships include communication, data analysis, cyber essentials/cyber security and management skills.

During the summer of 2020 a number of surveys were conducted online with digital businesses across the region to identify what they felt were their skills needs both in the short and medium term. In order to obtain key answers to the key questions, the questions put to them were both relevant to skills, recruitment and apprenticeships. The businesses contacted were mainly micro-businesses and highlighted below are some of the specific questions put to these SMEs:

- Which job roles are generally hard to recruit for?
- Areas of specific skills shortages within the business?
- What barriers, if any, make it difficult to access, or prevent you from undertaking training for your workforce from training providers, FE Colleges and other training institutions?
- Do you currently employ or have previously employed an apprentice within your organisation?

A full set of findings can be found in the full Segment Two report but there is a brief overview of the findings below. The survey involved between 15 to 20 digital sector SMEs. The fundamental purpose of this survey was to provide a “snapshot” of what SMEs within the digital sector identify as important and to better understand what their needs and requirements are. If those needs and requirements are known, then it allows us to better provide skills solutions to help address them and utilise the parameters within the Let's Talk Real Skills project to further address them.

Which job roles are generally hard to recruit for?

- Developers/Developer Ops
- Junior Developers
- Creative design roles
- Copywriters
- 3D Photographers
- Account Managers
- Cloud & Data Science roles
- Programmers
- Coders
- Research & Data Analyst's
- Digital Marketing Apprenticeships (Level 3 & 4)
- CAD Technician

Areas of specific skills shortages within the business?

- Programming skills
- Predicted Analytics
- Leadership & Management
- Coding
- Presentation skills
- Researchers and Data experts
- Adobe Suite
- Website design
- 3D & Model creation technical skills
- 3D Studio Max
- VR Visualisation software (Key for Graduates)
- Digital print
- Virtual reality
- Senior Level Accounting (Level 4+)
- Project Management
- CAD

- MS Excel (Intermediate/Advanced)
- Hologram technology
- Content writers

What barriers, if any, make it difficult to access, or prevent you from undertaking training for your workforce from training providers, FE Colleges and other training institutions?

- Courses available are not relevant to business need/not suitable
- Lack of public funding for training
- Training costs too expensive
- Lack of training budget
- Lack of online provision
- Taking staff out of the business to attend training

Do you currently employ or have previously employed an apprentice within your organisation?

- Have had a negative experience in the past
- Lack of information available on how to recruit an apprentice
- No suitable candidates available
- Organisation too small
- Actively looking to recruit an apprentice(s)

Collaborative Investments

Work is on-going to develop a series of pilot projects which will help to address some of the skills gaps identified within the segment reports. To date, these pilots include: -

- Business skills support for digital micro-businesses – developing skills to run a micro-business
- Digital skills development suite – training in MS Office 365, Sharepoint, OneDrive, OneNote, MS Edge
- Digital transformation through digital readiness

If the pilots receive endorsement from the CSP members and support from the board then they will be rolled out as pilot projects across partner colleges funded by the Let's Talk Real Skills programme.

Key Findings/Conclusions

There appears to be a feeling from within the industry that more "all-rounders" are needed. There appears to be too many people that specialise in areas that are too specific. Although not common place from within the sector, the need is for more "rounded" individuals with a multiple array of skills, not just technically specific within one area but also possess some additional work experience with additional skills which might include business skills such as communication, time management, delegation, presentation skills, as well as project management and customer service skills and perhaps some skills linked to managing others.

Final observations are that stakeholders and employers caution that qualifications do not always equate to the skills demanded within the industry. Digital employers, in particular, expressed concern that the content of degree courses is often not relevant to the workplace. Within the digital and creative sub-sector, a large number of people with generic university qualifications for instance, have entered the industry but many lack the more job-specific skills that would enable them to become fully effective in a particular occupation without further training after university.

Find out more about the Digital Collaborative Skills Partnership and get in touch through - <https://www.westyorkshirecolleges.co.uk/contracted-projects/lets-talk-real-skills/digital>