



### What is a Sector Skills Council?

Sector Skills Councils are independent, strategic UK-wide organisations. They have responsibility for skills and workforce development of all those employed in their sectors - from professional staff to tradesmen and women, administrative staff, support staff and other ancillary workers. They also cover all sizes of employer - from large firms to micro-businesses and the self employed.

Each SSC is an employer-led organisation that actively involves trade unions, professional bodies and other key stakeholders. They replace a network of over 70 National Training Organisations (NTOs).

Collectively the SSCs form the **Skills for Business Network**, which is responsible for tackling the skills and productivity needs of the UK. The **Sector Skills Development Agency (SSDA)** is responsible for funding, supporting and monitoring the network of Sector Skills Councils. All SSCs are licensed by the Secretary of State for Education and Skills, in consultation with Ministers in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.

### What is their purpose/role?

Sector Skills Councils have been established to influence how training is delivered in the UK. All SSCs have the same four key goals and each SSC is responsible for dealing with the skills needs within their sector UK-wide. The four key goals are:

- Reduce skills gaps and shortages
- Improve productivity
- Increase opportunities for all individuals in the workforce
- Improve learning supply

For the first time, SSCs give employers direct influence on training policy.

Unlike the former National Training Organisations, which were responsible only for apprenticeship training, Sector Skills Councils are looking at education and training at all levels, from apprenticeships to Masters Degrees.

### What is their vision for skills and knowledge development in the UK workforce?

If UK manufacturing is to survive in the face of competition from products manufactured in the developing regions of the world such as India, Asia and China, it will have to be more productive in terms of output, innovative in terms of products and services provided and agile in terms of its response to the customer. This will place demands on the UK workforce, which will only be equipped to meet those demands if skill and knowledge levels are increased. All levels of staff will need to increase their skill levels to meet this challenge. Particular skills that will be required include team working and communication, supervisory and management, product and process innovation.

### **How will the Sector Skills Councils effect their vision?**

The SSCs have carried out a review of the skills needs and trends for their industries and are developing strategies to meet those skills needs. This process has been carried out in partnership with the businesses that operate in their sector and has involved four steps:

- skills needs analysis
- analysis of training provision
- gap analysis including scenario planning
- development of a programme of agreed interventions to close the gap

The output - the programme of agreed interventions - is termed the **Sector Skills Agreement** and, because it has been developed in partnership with employers, it has their support. It covers all levels of the workforce from school leavers to senior management and seeks to influence Further and Higher Education to ensure that the required skills can be delivered.

Most Sector Skills Councils will have a Sector Skills Agreement in place by the end of 2006.

### **How will their vision affect/influence higher education?**

The Sector Skills Councils will be expecting HEIs to develop the skills required in students entering the workplace for the first time. They will also be looking to HEIs to develop the existing workforce by providing suitable Foundation Degrees, Honours Degrees and Masters programmes. In particular, they will be looking for Foundation Degrees and Masters programmes to be formulated to meet the needs of their sector, and may seek out suitable and responsive HEIs to develop bespoke courses. This upskilling of the existing workforce is likely to provide a supply of mature students who wish to study part time or by distance learning.

### **How should HEIs respond?**

The impact of SSCs on HEIs is potentially wide ranging:

- HEIs may wish to form teaching and learning partnerships with relevant Sector Skills Councils or directly with leading businesses. These partnerships could build on existing research links, or could link specialist institutional teaching to relevant sectors or could build upon the presence of local or regional industry clusters.
- An increasing supply of mature students with substantial industrial experience, previous qualifications, or wide ranging backgrounds will lead to increasing need for Accreditation of Prior Learning and for customised/individualised learning programmes.
- The availability of part-time students in full time employment offers the opportunity to exploit the work place as a learning environment.

- In terms of course content, it is apparent that technical graduates will require a knowledge of business improvement techniques whilst non-technical graduates will require a better understanding of materials and materials processing.

### Which Sector Skills Councils are relevant to the materials sector?

There are currently 25 SSCs covering all sectors of the economy from textiles to finance and IT. Materials is relevant to those industrial sectors involved in the manufacture of products and those who support the manufacture of products through product design, processing and fabrication, and inspection and repair.

We have identified FIVE sector skills councils with an interest in materials, and have established contact with them:

#### COGENT

Cogent is the SSC for chemicals, nuclear, oil and gas, petroleum and polymer processing industries. These industries are facing major change and challenge driven by global competition, sustainability, demand for low carbon energy, depleting natural resources and the changing demographics of the UK workforce. They must deliver improved productivity and shift up the value chain if they are to survive.

Cogent has identified the following key strategic themes:

- Productivity - To drive forward productivity, we must up-skill the existing workforce must be up-skilled and companies need to be engaged in this activity.
- Attraction, supply and age profile - There is significant concern regarding the in-flow of skills to the industries to meet future demands and this demographic profile has the capacity to significantly constrict GDP growth.
- Innovation - To succeed in the long term and have competitive modern manufacturing, to innovation both of products and processes is required.
- Management and leadership - The potential for success will depend heavily on leadership. Concerns have been raised across the Cogent industries regarding the capability of management to drive forward improvement and change.

#### SEMTA

SEMTA is the SSC for science, engineering and manufacturing technologies. Its remit covers a very large and diverse industry sector, including:

- Aerospace
- Automotive
- Bioscience
- Electronics
- Engineered Metals
- Forensic Science
- Maintenance

- Marine
- Mathematics
- Mechanical
- Science

The Engineered metals sub-sector includes the foundry industry and the metal processing sector, and the skills needs of this group is looked after by [Metskill](#).

Metskill has identified five key industry drivers:

- the recruitment of high calibre new entrants
- achieving workforce competence and culture change
- reducing costs, releasing cash and improving customer service
- managing performance, change and effective supply chain relationships
- developing a cadre of high quality Engineers who can lead change

#### [ProSkills UK](#)

Proskills is the SSC for the coatings, extractives, glass and glazing, building products and printing industries and therefore has a strong interest in materials technology. Proskills looks at the skills needs of each of its five sub-sectors individually, but common themes emerge:

- workforce recruitment and retention
- key skills (numeracy, teamworking, problem solving, communication)
- health and safety and environmental management
- supervisory and management skills
- multi-skilling
- implementing advanced manufacturing technologies and increasing productivity

#### [Energy and Utility Skills](#)

EU Skills is the SSC for creation and delivery of electricity, fuel for heat, water, the removal of waste water and the waste management sector. In view of their impact on the health, safety and environment of individual consumers, there is a strong need for Higher Education qualifications in the utilities. There is particular interest in materials within the power generation industry, and work elsewhere<sup>1</sup> has highlighted the need for the UK to recover, capture and develop the knowledge base of high integrity structural materials for future power generation through the establishment of specialist Masters level courses.

#### [Skillfast-UK](#)

Skillfast-UK covers the apparel, footwear and textiles supply chain, from the processing of raw materials to product manufacture to the after-sales servicing of products.

The supply chain is highly complex, taking a large number of elements from raw material supply through all processing stages to finished goods, as well as ancillary functions such as design, trading, wholesaling, converting and support services. The sector also serves a wide range of consumer and industrial end-use markets.

The largest sub-sector within Skillfast is the manufacture of made-up textiles (including household textiles and soft furnishings) and the manufacture of outerwear. There is also a significant subsector involved with the production and application of technical textiles.

The sector faces strong international competition and its survival will depend on increased productivity and innovation. The aim of the Skillfast qualifications strategy is to improve the learning supply to ensure the workforce possesses the skills that enable them to:

- innovate through design and the use of smart technologies and materials.
- improve productivity and be skills rich in areas of leadership, technology, craft and business, all of which are required to meet market needs and innovate effectively.

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<sup>1</sup> Report of the Materials Innovation and Growth Team - 'A Strategy for Materials' (see [www.matUK.co.uk](http://www.matUK.co.uk))