

# Workforce Development - what is it?

'Workforce development is vital to raising productivity, reducing social exclusion and enabling organisations to innovate and manage change.'

*Adult Skills in the 21st Century - Part 2, Strategy Unit Report, November 2002*

The government has made workforce development a top priority. UK labour productivity currently lags behind that of other major industrialised countries and the need to raise skills levels is essential for the gap to be closed. The argument in support of workforce development is a winning one. Higher skills contribute to higher productivity, increased productivity leads to economic growth which in turn benefits individuals, employers and the wider community. There is a firm belief that raising productivity and skill levels will have a positive effect on social inclusion.

There is an abundance of evidence to show that developing employees' skills and knowledge and recognising their achievements affects the way they work. Employees with the right skills work more effectively and more efficiently. In turn this increases productivity, improves customer satisfaction and helps to drive the business forward.

Developing employees and equipping them with new skills also gives individuals and teams greater commitment to the business and greater flexibility. This enables employees to respond more quickly to changes in the business and allows growth in new markets.

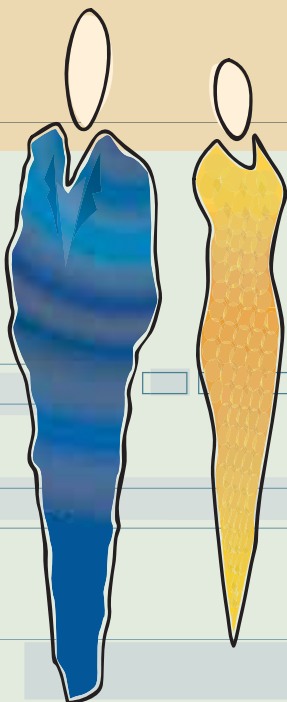
The impact on the 'bottom line' is also evident. The net effect of developing the workforce is a tangible difference to business performance. Skills shortages and absenteeism all mean extra costs for the business. Motivating employees reduces absenteeism rates and improves quality and efficiency – skilled and motivated employees are more likely to continually examine their work and raise quality and output.

There is a clear link between investing in employees, employee satisfaction, customer satisfaction and therefore business performance. The case for developing the workforce is stronger now than ever before.

*'The Institute of Directors believes that the development of the workforce in Northern Ireland is of paramount importance. We have already lost much of our traditional, labour intensive manufacturing to low wage economies and even the newer industries face a threat from more competitive countries.'*

*'If we want to compete at the higher value added end of manufacturing and in the new knowledge based sectors, we must ensure that our workforce is committed to improving its skills continuously and on a lifelong basis. We can no longer afford to rest on the laurels of secondary and tertiary education qualifications.'*

**Linda R Brown**  
**Divisional Director**  
**IoD Northern Ireland**



## What is Workforce Development?

Workforce development (WfD) is not a specific activity but rather encompasses all activities which increase the capacity of individuals to participate effectively in the workplace, thereby improving their productivity and employability.

Source: In Demand Skills in the 21st Century

The term WfD does not define mode or method but it does establish a vital link between learning and business needs. It is about raising participation and attainment of learning in response to economic change and innovation. It is about equipping those already in work with the necessary knowledge and skills to meet future work demands, and it is about preparing those entering the workforce by providing them with the kind of skills to ensure future employability.

## Who is responsible for WfD?

Partnership and cooperation lie at the heart of WfD. There are significant roles for everyone whose interests are served by higher skills, improved productivity and a better economy. Government, employers, suppliers, employees and trade unions all have their part to play.

The government contributes through its skills strategy and other projects designed to address the issue of raising skills in the workplace. Employers participate by helping to identify skills gaps at local levels and helping to design the programmes to fill those gaps. The suppliers, FE and other skills training providers, respond by creating flexible, adaptable approaches to learning linked to business needs.

It is important that employees and trade unions are also in this partnership as it is their commitment to addressing skill shortfalls and their support for learning in the workplace that will make workforce development a reality.

## A role for QCA

QCA has a crucial role to play in the achievement of the long term vision of a skilled and flexible workforce. Nationally, QCA is leading on developments in relation to improving qualifications, ensuring that qualifications and their components are developed in response to existing skills shortages. QCA will be consulting with all the main stakeholders on ways in which to make qualifications sufficiently flexible to meet and anticipate the different training and learning needs of employers and individuals.

Working with CCEA, its regulatory partner in Northern Ireland and in collaboration with Sector Skills Councils (SSCs) and other sector bodies in Northern Ireland, QCA will ensure that work on qualifications is informed by regional as well as national interests and that the specific sector qualification needs of Northern Ireland are reflected in emerging sector qualification strategies.

