



National Audit Office

A REVIEW BY THE  
NATIONAL AUDIT OFFICE  
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GoSkills

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For further information about us  
please contact:

National Audit Office  
157-197 Buckingham Palace Road  
Victoria  
London  
SW1W 9SP

Tel: 020 7798 7000  
Email: [enquiries@nao.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:enquiries@nao.gsi.gov.uk)

Newcastle Office  
First Floor  
89 Sandyford Road  
Newcastle upon Tyne  
NE1 8HW

Tel: 0191 269 1820

For further information please  
contact:

**David Corner**  
Director

Tel: 0191 269 1891  
Email: [david.corner@nao.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:david.corner@nao.gsi.gov.uk)

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# Part One

## Preface

**1.1** Sector Skills Councils (SSCs) are partially publicly funded, employer led organisations that cover specific economic sectors in the United Kingdom. They have three key goals:

- Raising employer engagement, demand and investment in skills;
- Ensuring authoritative Labour Market Information for their sectors; and
- Development of National Occupational Standards and ensuring qualifications meet employer needs.

**1.2** There are 25 SSCs, covering about 85 per cent of the British workforce.

### **SSC Relicensing**

**1.3** Sector Skills Councils operate under licence from the UK Government.

**1.4** The UK Commission for Employment and Skills (UKCES) is responsible for arrangements for relicensing the SSCs with the aim of ensuring the Councils will be more sharply focused on raising employer ambition and investment in skills at all levels, articulating future skills needs of their sector and ensuring that the supply of skills and qualifications is driven by employers.

**1.5** The UK Commissioners will make their recommendations on whether to relicense or not to the Secretary of State. The Secretary of State for Innovation, Universities, and Skills, in consultation with Ministers in Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland is responsible for awarding a new licence.

### **The National Audit Office Role**

**1.6** The National Audit Office has been asked by the UK Commission for Employment and Skills to undertake an Independent Performance Assessment of each Sector Skills Council to help inform decision making by the Commissioners.

**1.7** We have undertaken the assessment in accordance with the UK Commission's relicensing framework for Sector Skills Councils and not as part of NAO's wider VFM programme to provide assurance to Parliament.

# Part Two

## Executive Summary

**2.1** GoSkills is the Sector Skills Council for the Passenger Transport sector. This is a heavily regulated sector, which has a high proportion of employer based training and a low take up of qualifications. GoSkills concentrates on increasing the transferability of skills within the sector and influencing the relevance of the UK and European Union legislative, regulatory and policy frameworks to the sector's skills agenda.

**2.2** Our assessment of GoSkills against the Relicensing Framework identified good progress against a number of the key tests including: strategic planning; employer engagement; standards and qualification development; partnership working and visible and active presence in the English regions and Devolved Nations. It also identified some areas for improvement including the need to further develop its evaluation processes to evidence the return on investment of skills in the sector and to improve its external communication to further promote its achievements and activities. There was also some concern raised about the SSC's timetable to achieve the Qualifications and Credit Framework deadline.

**2.3** Key areas of strengths include:

- GoSkills engages well with employers and has an employer led governance structure with representation from across the sector.
- GoSkills has developed a clear link from its strategic goals to its operational plans and objectives for its staff.
- There is evidence of the SSC having strategic influence, for example, through brokering Train to Gain funding for the self employed in England and by being asked to become a lead SSC for the Commonwealth Games in Scotland.
- There is evidence of a culture of continuous improvement through its response to the independent organisational assessment it underwent in 2008.
- The work the SSC undertakes on National Occupational Standards. These feed into National Vocational Qualifications, which are valued by the sector.
- Partnership working across a range of stakeholders including trade and professional bodies and other SSCs.

- Visible and active regional and national managers.
- Development of some innovative sector specific solutions based on employer demand and research.

**2.4** Areas where GoSkills needs to improve include:

- GoSkills needs to improve the promotion and marketing of its achievements and activities.
- Within the last 12 months GoSkills has started to embed its strategic direction across the organisation through its performance management system and it needs to continue to implement the strategy.
- The strategic direction in Wales needs to be communicated by the SSC by sharing its delivery plan once finalised.
- GoSkills needs to continue to increase the reach of its strategic influence in relation to policy and legislation impacting on the sector.
- The SSC needs to complete its review of its membership offer to look at how to encourage increased participation.
- The new Qualifications and Credit Framework timetable needs to be communicated to ensure all stakeholders are comfortable with GoSkills' ability to meet the Government set deadline.
- GoSkills needs to implement its evaluation strategy.
- The Board needs to review its performance measures within the strategic plan. The results in the second year of the five year strategy suggest that the performance measures are not stretching.

**2.5 Commissioners may wish to explore the following issues in more detail with the SSC:**

- How it will improve its marketing and communication to promote the achievements and activities of the SSC.
- The potential risks within its chosen business model to have limited income generating products and rely on its core grant and project funding, especially given the current economic climate which may lead to a decrease in revenue from its members. For example, the SSC is currently unable to find the funds to increase the capacity of its policy review function in line with its aspirations.
- Why a number of the performance measures set within the five year strategy were exceeded in the second year?

## Theme 1: A Well Run SSC

**2.6** The Board is employer led and plays an important strategic role. GoSkills has a defined UK wide strategic plan, which is underpinned by employer research. It is aligned to public policy within the four nations through its delivery plans. Within Wales, some stakeholders are unclear of the strategic direction of the SSC. GoSkills believes that this will be communicated more clearly when it launches its delivery plan for Wales.

**2.7** The strategy has been in place since 2007-08. During the last 12 months the SSC has been improving its performance management system with the aim of embedding the strategic objectives across the organisation. It has done this by making the links from the strategic objectives down through the operational plans to individuals' objectives much more explicit than they have been in the past.

**2.8** The SSC has effective internal controls in place for financial and risk management. The SSC has a small number of staff and is financially prudent about its operations. As GoSkills has positioned itself as a strategic organisation, it only has a limited number of commercial products through which it can earn sustainable income. Capacity is therefore linked to its core and project funding. This could limit how quickly its work impacts on the sector as a whole. However, there is evidence that the SSC is effective at working within its capacity and, through the use of partnerships and networks, ensures that impacts are happening.

**2.9** One of GoSkills' strategic objectives is to influence the large quantity of UK and European Union legislative, regulatory and policy frameworks to increase its relevance to the sector's skills agenda. GoSkills has been able to demonstrate strategic influence. For example, GoSkills ensured that the self employed were eligible for funding through Train to Gain in England for the first time. Prior to this, Train to Gain funding was unavailable for the self employed. In Scotland, GoSkills has been asked to be a lead SSC for skills on the 2015 Glasgow Commonwealth Games. Also, on behalf of the employers in the bus and coach industry, it influenced how the Passenger Carrying Vehicles Driver Certificate of Professional Competence would be implemented across the UK.

**2.10** The SSC is aware it needs to increase its profile in order to achieve its strategic goals. Employers and stakeholders are not always aware of what GoSkills has achieved or its role in some of the solutions and interventions it has helped to develop in the sector. This may well be behind the view held by some stakeholders that GoSkills is a reactive rather than a proactive organisation.

**2.11** GoSkills has pulled the sector together to focus on skills in the Passenger Transport sector. It was also noted that the sector is beginning to see the advantages of this sectoral approach to skills. Employers we spoke to valued having a separate Sector Skills Council for the Passenger Transport sector.

**2.12** The SSC had found both the rail and aviation industries challenging to engage with. The rail industry employers had initially been sceptical due to their experience with previous rail skills bodies. The rail industry joined GoSkills one year after it was initially licensed. Through the success of its work within the bus and coach industry and smaller projects with the rail employers, the SSC has made significant progress in engaging the employers in this industry. This was evidenced by the feedback received from the railway employers. Engagement with the aviation industry remains a challenge but, since the appointment of an airline onto its Board, GoSkills has been able to evidence improvement in its engagement with this industry. It has good engagement with the Civil Aviation Authority.

## **Theme 2: SSC Core Products and Services**

**2.13** The research and Labour Market Intelligence produced by GoSkills is regarded as high quality by those who are aware of it. In Wales, there was some criticism of intelligence specific to that nation. GoSkills is increasing its focus on Wales where a lack of continuity of staff has affected past performance.

**2.14** There is also evidence of good performance within the area of National Occupational Standards and qualifications development. There was evidence that the staff within this area are well respected for their expertise and experience. There is a risk that the SSC will not meet the Qualification and Curriculum Framework deadline at the end of 2010. However, the SSC has reallocated resource to address this and the Stakeholder Board is keeping the position under review.

**2.15** Feedback from employers and other stakeholders indicates that GoSkills is contributing to an increased uptake in qualifications across the sector, which has historically been low. For example, major airlines are becoming engaged with qualifications for the first time.

## **Theme 3: SSC Sector Specific Solutions**

**2.16** GoSkills' focus is on partnership working and brokering solutions between sector stakeholders. This was cited as a key strength by interviewees.

**2.17** Its sector specific solutions are based on research and employer consultation and its routes to market are appropriate to the sector. Employer feedback confirmed that it is easy for them to access the SSC's services.

**2.18** GoSkills delivers national solutions based on sector changes, for example, the work undertaken on Passenger Carrying Vehicle Driver Certificate of Professional Competence. It also helps to develop local solutions generated from employer consultation, which are then shared across the regions and nations as appropriate. An example of this is the Taxi Pre-employment Project, which was developed to get unemployed people into jobs as taxi drivers.

## **Theme 4: SSC Results and Impacts**

**2.19** To monitor its strategy, the SSC has put in place performance measures. The majority of the targets have been exceeded in the second year of the five year strategy, which suggests the performance measures are not stretching.

**2.20** Through improvements to its performance management system, the SSC now has a clear thread linking its strategic goals to its operational plans and objectives for its staff. As the key performance indicators that support the action plans do not contain smart targets, performance reports to the Board are activity based and narrative in style. It would be good practice to implement a form of dashboard or balanced scorecard which would provide the Board with an overview of progress against the key strategic and operational objectives and help provide focus.

**2.21** GoSkills can point to some significant impacts in influencing how new legislation would be delivered and leveraging funding to be used by employers. It now needs to improve its evaluation to be able to evidence the return on investment in skills within the sector.

## Part Three

### Context for GoSkills work

**3.1** GoSkills is the Sector Skills Council for the Passenger Transport industry, which covers Taxi and Private Hire, Rail, Bus and Coach, Inland Waterways, Aviation, Community Transport, Driver Training and Transport Planning.

**3.2** The GoSkills sector is of medium size which employs 700,000 people. The Gross Value Added per employee is £55,400. Bus and Coach is the largest industry in the footprint employing 30 per cent of the employees in the sector, followed by Taxi and Private Hire (24 per cent) and Rail (20 per cent). Within the sector, the vast majority of businesses are sole traders, which account for approximately 219,000 of the 240,000 businesses in the sector. However, 41 per cent of employees are employed by the largest 0.2 per cent of employers.

**3.3** Core funding from the UK Commission for Employment and Skills of £1.6 million was received in 2008, equating to £2.28 per employee. GoSkills is a small organisation, which at the time of writing employs 32 people plus contract staff.

**3.4** GoSkills was established and fully licensed in 2004. It replaced the training organisations in its sector, and has worked since its inception to identify the common skills issues in the Passenger Transport sector and incorporate this into its strategy. The mission statement of the SSC is “We work with employers to improve the skills that make a difference to the performance of the Passenger Transport sector.”

**3.5** The Passenger Transport sector is heavily regulated and is affected by legislation from both the UK and the European Union. The Driver Certificate in Professional Competence is a European Union directive, across the whole transport sector.

**3.6** The sector is one in which historically there has been a low take up of qualifications, although there has been a high level of employer based training.

**3.7** GoSkills has set itself the following objectives; As the lead body for skills, workforce development and labour market data for the Passenger Transport sector, it will:

- Provide a coherent and authoritative voice on skills and qualifications.
- Enhance access for employers and individuals to economically valuable skills and qualifications.

- Enable sector employers to derive maximum business advantage through improved investment in skills and qualifications.
- Increase the relevance of the UK and EU legislative, regulatory and policy frameworks to the Sector's skills agenda.
- Develop the sustainability of the sector through skills and promote it as a career of choice.

**3.8** The sector faces a number of key challenges. Passenger demand is increasing in terms of expectations and usage and is likely to rise. The sector needs to find ways to improve its impact on the environment. Finally, the pace of technological change is growing, which requires a new range of skills.

## Part Four

### A Well Run SSC

The SSC is employer led, has the confidence and support of employers in its sector, and is a strategically and operationally effective organisation.

**4.1** GoSkills has pulled the sector together to focus on skills in the Passenger Transport sector. It has achieved this through developing relations with its bigger employers and trade and professional bodies. The SSC has a small number of staff and is financially prudent about its operations. The SSC is aware it needs to increase its profile in order to achieve its strategic goals.

**4.2** The GoSkills **Board** is employer led and has good representation from across the industries, regions and nations as well as company size. The majority of the Board members are employers and there is also a representative from the main trade union and a transport solutions charity. The Board's role is to set the strategic direction and govern the SSC. In interview we were informed that the Non-Executives regularly challenge the Executive team. In the Board meeting we attended, we saw this to be the case. Due to delays of marrying up calendars when new Board members were appointed, attendance at the Board meetings in 2008 suffered. However this has improved in 2009.

**4.3** The Board is supported and advised by a Stakeholder Board, which ensures the **governance** structure fully represents all industries of the Passenger Transport footprint. The Stakeholder Board has 24 members, mostly employers, who meet on a quarterly basis. The Stakeholder Board is chaired by a Board member, and attended by the Executive Directors of GoSkills.

**4.4** The Board is also supported by a network of regional and industry groups which report to the main Board. The SSC's governance structure is currently being reviewed, as following a comment from one of the Industry Group Chairs, the Senior Management team decided to review the structure and remit of each of the groups. Following this, some of the groups such as the Taxi and Private Hire Group have had new terms of reference agreed by the Board and the review of the remaining groups is being progressed by the new Director of Operations.

**4.5** The current groups include regional and Devolved Nation employer groups and five specific industry groups representing Scheduled Road Passenger Transport (bus, coach, tram and community transport), Taxi, Private Hire, Rail, Aviation and Professional Groups (transport planners and driver training). It also has three whole sector function groups which cover cross regional and sector issues.

**4.6** GoSkills has developed a five year **strategy** based upon its Labour Market Intelligence and the research for its Sector Skills Agreement. GoSkills has involved employers in the development of its strategic plan through its regional and sector forums. The Sector Skills Agreement identified 13 skills priorities for the sector across the UK. The current strategy links each of these priorities into one of its five strategic objectives.

**4.7** GoSkills has a three year rolling business plan, which supports the strategy. It incorporates the finance plan, HR strategy, research strategy and annual operating plans which can all be linked back to the five strategic objectives. The SSC has an annual business planning process in which each of the above plans are refreshed as necessary.

**4.8** The strategy has been in place since 2007-08 and, during the last 12 months, the SSC has been improving its performance management system so that for 2009-10 there is now an explicit link from the strategic objectives down through the operational plans to individual's objectives with the aim that this will embed the strategic objectives across the organisation. There was some evidence from staff interviews that this was starting to happen, but it is too early to assess the effectiveness of this approach.

**4.9** The SSC's strategy is UK wide but delivered via national and regional delivery plans. These are developed and delivered on a regional and national basis which allows them to take into account national policy differences. The employer groups in the regions and Devolved Nations are used to help develop and monitor these local plans. There are currently two regions that do not have an employer group, East of England and South West. GoSkills told us that the groups do not meet in these regions at the request of employers. Delivery against these regional plans is monitored by the Senior Executive team. As part of the review of employer groups by the Director of Operations, the SSC is looking at ways to reinstate these groups possibly through 'virtual' methods.

**4.10** GoSkills **engages** with **employers** in a number of ways: at a strategic level through the Board, Stakeholder Board and various advisory groups; at an operational level through its team of regional and national Managers or Workforce Development team working on solutions or standards and qualification development; and by working in partnership with trade and professional bodies to reach smaller owner managed businesses.

**4.11** The SSC faces a challenge in engaging with the large number of sole traders and small and medium sized enterprises within its sector. In order to maximise the impact of its employer engagement GoSkills has developed a strategy which differentiates its employers and the way in which it will engage with them. Across the sector there are a small number of very large employers which GoSkills aims to have a high level of engagement with. Across each of the industries GoSkills has been successful in this strategy, particularly rail and bus and coach. Progress is also being made at engaging with most of the UK based airlines.

**4.12** GoSkills has less direct contact with the smaller employers. An important part of its strategy is to influence the skills of the smaller employers via engagement with trade and professional bodies. For example, the Bus and Coach sector has a high degree of small and medium sized businesses and GoSkills engages with the Confederation of Passenger Transport (CPT) to influence this sector. The CPT has an influence on the Board through an active CPT member who is also a Non-Executive Director and is part of the SSC's membership scheme.

**4.13** In the Taxi and Private Hire and Driver Training industries there are a large number of sole traders. It is the SSC's strategy to engage with the licensing authorities, local authorities and London's Public Carriage Office for the taxi and private hire industry and Driving Standards Agency on the Continuing Professional Development of driver trainers.

**4.14** The SSC has found both the Rail and Aviation industries challenging to engage with. The Rail industry employers had initially been sceptical due to their experience with previous industry skills bodies. However, through the success of its work within the Bus and Coach industry and smaller projects with the rail employers, the SSC has made significant progress in engaging the employers in this sector. This was evidenced by the feedback received from the railway employers. Engagement with the Aviation sector remains a challenge but, since the appointment of a representative of an airline on the Board, GoSkills has been able to evidence improvement in its engagement. It also has good engagement with the Civil Aviation Authority.

**4.15** All the employers we spoke to were supportive of GoSkills and there was the general view that employer engagement and consultation had continued to improve. This was also supported by the Sector Skills Development Agency Employer Survey in 2007, which reported employer satisfaction rate of 78 per cent (above the average for all SSCs) and more recently by the SSCs own annual independent employer survey.

**4.16** In interview a number of employers were unaware of GoSkills' full remit as a Sector Skills Council. They were unaware of core functions such as research. This is in part linked to a more general need for the SSC to better promote itself. GoSkills is aware that it needs to promote its activities and achievements more than it has to date.

**4.17** Employers and stakeholders are not always aware of what GoSkills has achieved or its role in some of the solutions it has helped to develop in the sector. This may be behind the view held by some stakeholders that GoSkills is a reactive rather than a proactive organisation.

**4.18** Due to long term illness, GoSkills has until recently, been operating without a Director of Operations whose duties had been re-allocated amongst the Executive team, including the Chief Executive. This meant that the Chief Executive had to become more involved in the operational detail of the business. With the recent appointment of the new Director of Operations, the Chief Executive should have more time to perform an outward facing role for the organisation which will also aid in improving the level of its marketing activities.

**4.19** GoSkills has engaged well with stakeholders across **the four nations**. It has 11 national and regional managers that cover the four nations and each of the nine English regions working to build relationships with local employers and stakeholders. In England, stakeholders and employers generally provided very positive feedback on the managers especially in relation to their visibility and accessibility.

**4.20** Within **Northern Ireland**, the employer led group is seen as providing good governance by the Department for Employment and Learning, but there are concerns that the SSC is not as proactive as it could be. There were also concerns around capacity due to the national manager also covering Scotland. GoSkills pointed out that it has strengthened its capacity in Scotland to allow the national manager to have more time to enable smooth coverage across both countries. It has also recently created two new posts of Head of Operations North UK and South UK.

**4.21** The SSC has, however, had some significant achievements in Northern Ireland. For example, it brokered funding for an independent training facility for bus and coach operators to help them achieve the Passenger Carrying Vehicle Driver Certificate of Professional Competence requirements on behalf of the Federation of Passenger Transport and Translink. It was noted by one of the larger employers in Northern Ireland that, if it was not for this project by GoSkills, it believes that a number of operators would be in breach of the European Union Directive.

**4.22** Within **Wales**, there was feedback that the stakeholders were unclear as to the strategic direction of the SSC. GoSkills wants to be more influential than it has hitherto and is in the process of developing plans to achieve this. Its Welsh Delivery Plan is currently being finalised with its employer group and this will then be shared with the Welsh Assembly Government. There have been three national managers within Wales in the last five years and it is hoped that this role will now stabilise. There is also a second manager in place from the Workforce Development team whose focus is on Wales. Generally, there was feedback that the SSC is seen as being very active at an operational level, working with employers, the unions and providers to develop solutions.

**4.23** Within **Scotland**, stakeholders and employers we spoke to gave positive feedback. The level of employer engagement was praised and it was felt that the SSC made good use of its resources, such as using networks well to achieve its goals. It was felt that the SSC needed to promote its achievements better as it had developed some innovative solutions within Scotland. For example, the delivery of the EU Directive on Passenger Carrying Vehicle Driver Certificate of Professional Competence in the Highlands and Islands and other rural areas where access to training facilities are limited, GoSkills was to develop an initiative whereby drivers in the Bus and Coach sector could access the training remotely working in partnership with a college and LearnDirect Scotland.

**4.24** As the SSC is a small organisation it depends upon partnership working and there is evidence that this is an area of strength. For example, the SSC works well with Skills for Logistics and the two SSCs have developed projects together such as the Joint Approvals Unit for Periodic Training, which is discussed in Section Six. The UK Commission for Employment and Skills has also asked for GoSkills to form a “buddying” relationship with each of the Sector Skills Bodies for Language, Customer Service and Small Businesses.

**4.25** The SSC has developed effective **internal controls**. It has a risk strategy which has policies and procedures for managing and responding to risk. It has an Audit Committee in place that reports to the Board in relation on the risk register and the SSC's financial plans.

**4.26** The financial plans are embedded into the business plan and have a clear link to the strategy. Its financial plans have long term forecasts to 2011. As GoSkills has positioned itself as a strategic organisation, it only has a limited number of commercial products through which it can earn sustainable income. Levels of capacity are therefore linked to its core and project funding.

**4.27** The SSC operates a membership scheme which it views as an important indication of employer engagement. Membership is voluntary and generates £76,000 per annum in funds for the SSC. The SSC has established a membership committee to look at opportunities to make its membership offer more attractive to protect and raise revenue during the current economic downturn.

**4.28** The SSC has recently implemented a three month reserves policy. As it is a not for profits organisation and has limited funding, its levels of reserves have yet to reach the necessary level. This has been discussed at the Board, which has agreed to build the reserves up over a period of time to ensure the organisation can continue to deliver its current level of work.

**4.29** The capacity and capability of GoSkills is affected by its chosen business model and could limit how quickly its work impacts on the sector as a whole. However, there is evidence that the SSC is effective at working within its capacity and through the use of partnerships and networks ensures that impacts are happening.

**4.30** GoSkills is a small organisation with 32 staff. During the visit, there was evidence that the staff working at GoSkills are motivated, professional, and committed. In interview, GoSkills staff demonstrated their knowledge and understanding of the sector and the skills landscape. The SSC has also received Customer First accreditation.

**4.31** In 2008, GoSkills commissioned Serco to conduct an organisational review. In line with the review's recommendation, and as a developing organisation, GoSkills underwent a reorganisation in October 2008. Job descriptions of staff were amended in line with the recommendations of the report. The restructure has led to improvements in the internal communication as new reporting structures have led to better sharing of information across teams. This was evidenced through the interviews.

**4.32** GoSkills plans to conduct its first staff survey in May 2009. The results are due in June 2009. Further, GoSkills employs two staff who commenced with the SSC as apprentices. Solihull College awarded GoSkills with the accolade of "Apprenticeship Employer of the Year 2007." One of the apprentices won "Apprentice of the Year 2007" again, from Solihull College. As the sector does not have a large number of apprenticeships, GoSkills helps to evidence the benefits of apprenticeships to the sector through its internal program.

**4.33** One of GoSkills' strategic objectives is to influence the large quantity of UK and European Union legislative, regulatory and policy frameworks to increase its relevance to the sector's skills agenda. GoSkills has been able to demonstrate strategic influence. For example, GoSkills ensured that the self employed were eligible for funding in England through Train to Gain for the first time. Prior to this, Train to Gain funding was unavailable for the self employed. Also, in Scotland, GoSkills has been asked to be a lead SSC for skills on the 2015 Glasgow Commonwealth Games. Further, on behalf of the employers in the Bus and Coach industry, it influenced how the Passenger Carrying Vehicles Driver Certificate of Professional Competence would be implemented across the UK.

**4.34** Due to the level of European legislation that affects the sector, GoSkills also wants to influence policy at a European level. To this end, it has recently contracted a public affairs agency to assist in achieving this. Within the organisational review, GoSkills is aware it needs to increase the reach of its strategic influence for the sector. GoSkills listed aspirational roles which would enable it to meet its strategic objectives in the future. One of these roles would increase capacity within the Policy team, but this is currently held vacant due to resource constraints.

**4.35** Employers we spoke to valued having a separate Sector Skills Council for the Passenger Transport sector. This is because there are specific skills priorities for the Passenger Transport sector, such as customer service, which are not priorities for other areas of transport. It was also noted that the sector is beginning to see the advantages of a sectoral approach to skills.

### **Strengths**

- Clear links from the strategic objectives down through the operational plans and individuals' objectives.
- Effective financial management and internal controls. Employer led governance on the Board and industry employer groups.
- Evidence of the SSC having strategic influence, for example, through brokering the Train to Gain funding for the self employed in the sector.
- Evidence of a culture of continuous improvement.
- GoSkills own apprenticeship scheme and apprentices.
- Visibility across the regions and nations.
- Customer First accreditation.

### **Areas for Improvement**

- Continuing to embed and implement its strategy.
- Promotion and marketing of GoSkills achievements and activities.
- Communicating its strategic direction in Wales by sharing its finalised delivery plan.
- Continue to review the membership offer to maintain/ increase the number of members and associated revenue stream.
- Continue to increase the reach of GoSkills strategic influence for the sector.
- Simplifying communication with employers, for example, by rolling out the Strategic Account Management process more widely.
- Considering whether performance differentials between the trade and professional sub-sectors can be reduced.

## Part Five

### SSC Core Product and Services

The SSC provides a clear, credible and coherent voice for employers on the skills and qualifications needs of the sector backed by high quality Labour Market Intelligence, standards and qualifications development.

**5.1** The research and Labour Market Intelligence produced by GoSkills is regarded as high quality by those who are aware of it. There is also evidence of good performance on National Occupational Standards and qualifications development, although there are risks the SSC will not meet the Qualification and Curriculum Framework deadline at the end of 2010. However, the SSC has reallocated resource to address this. Feedback from employers and other stakeholders indicates that GoSkills is contributing to an increased uptake in qualifications across the sector.

**5.2** GoSkills **research strategy** (2008-13), is linked to the strategic objectives of the SSC and sets out a high level plan for the intended research each year split by industry. This is supplemented by **bespoke research** to address specific skills issues in response to employer demand. A large employer survey is undertaken every two years. In the meantime, employer groups are used as a research audience. Research is refreshed based on the release of secondary data and perceived need. It was noted that the country factsheets on the GoSkills website are sourced to data from 2005 and 2006. The research report outlining GoSkills latest UK and sector wide employer survey is available on the website. This report is in the process of being disseminated to nation reports.

**5.3** The employers and stakeholders who had seen or used GoSkills research and **Labour Market Intelligence** commented that it was of a high quality. This is consistent with the employer survey undertaken by GoSkills in 2008 which showed that 72 per cent of respondents that had seen the Labour Market Intelligence produced by GoSkills felt it was “above standard”, “good” or “excellent”. In Wales, there was some criticism of intelligence specific to that nation. GoSkills is increasing its focus on Wales where lack of continuity of staff has affected past performance.

**5.4** The research is easily accessible through the GoSkills website. The level of awareness of this research, however, varied and there were a number of employers who did not realise that GoSkills produced sectoral Labour Market Intelligence. This is linked to the more general point that GoSkills needs to improve its marketing (Section Four; paragraph 16).

**5.5** GoSkills aims to use partnership working opportunities in the research field and to avoid duplication of work. GoSkills attends quarterly meetings with other SSC research teams to identify opportunities for partnership working. Work has been undertaken with other SSCs, in particular Skills for Logistics, SEMTA and People 1st. There has also been joint working with employers, Future Skills Scotland, licensing authorities (regarding the Taxi sector) and the Rail Safety and Standards Board.

**5.6** Research and Labour Market Intelligence underpins the priorities for the sector as set out in the **Sector Skills Agreement**. The Sector Skills Agreement was compiled through research and consultation with the sector. GoSkills use the Sector Skills Agreement to develop action plans drawn directly from the research undertaken. Other research projects are undertaken to address sector issues. For example, GoSkills is currently completing a research project based on the effects of the economic downturn on the sector.

**5.7** A Sector Skills Agreement is in place for all of the nations and is tailored to the needs of each particular nation. For example, in Scotland there are many initiatives with Highland and Islands Enterprise and the Scottish Qualifications Authority. GoSkills has developed a delivery plan for 2009-10 for each nation and region. The delivery plans replace the sector skills agreement action plans. The plans reflect the refreshed data from its employer census in 2008, but are also linked to the 13 priorities identified in the sector skills agreements.

**5.8** GoSkills, working in partnership with employers, awarding bodies and stakeholders, has developed a **sector qualifications strategy** for the Passenger Transport sector. The sector qualifications strategy builds on the Sector Skills Agreement research and sets out the sector's priorities. The stakeholder Board and regional employer groups were consulted early in the process to ensure the qualification strategy was driven by employer demand. Employer and stakeholder engagement has continued throughout the process, culminating in the stakeholder Board signing off its approval of the Level Two qualifications developed to date. The majority of employers interviewed felt that GoSkills is instrumental in helping to develop the qualifications that they want. The SSC has a quality assurance process with appropriate review procedures.

**5.9 National Occupational Standards** are becoming more established in the sector. GoSkills has responsibility for 21 suites of National Occupational Standards comprising 417 units, which are updated every three to five years unless there is an industry need for them to be refreshed sooner, for example, to reflect changes in regulation. Employers and stakeholders are involved in the development of National Occupational Standards through the scoping and consultation process. General awareness of National Occupational Standards, as evidenced through employer and stakeholder interviews, varied. Many of the interviewees who were not directly aware of the National Occupational Standards were, however, very positive about the National Vocational Qualifications which are underpinned by them.

**5.10** Progress is being made against the Qualifications and Credit Framework and there is a timetable in place. The current timetable details that one Driver Training Vocational Qualification will miss the 31 December 2010 deadline by one month. The SSC has been prudent on its timetabling. GoSkills has revisited its internal procedures for standards and qualifications work and revisited job roles in order to resource appropriately for this work. In interview, it believed that all work streams for the Qualifications and Credit Framework will be completed in time to meet the 31 December deadline. The Qualifications and Curriculum Authority commented that GoSkills will need to continue to develop its capacity and capability in this area, but that it had already started to work with the awarding bodies to ensure that this is done.

**5.11** Qualification development is carried out by GoSkills in conjunction with awarding organisations. GoSkills has recognised the issues faced by awarding bodies in relation to the Qualifications and Credit Framework and is taking on work to develop units of assessment and rules of combination in order to support the awarding bodies. The SSC has formally submitted an application to Ofqual for approval to work in this way.

**5.12** Positive feedback was received from **awarding bodies** regarding their relationship with GoSkills, particularly in the areas of research, leadership, and staff understanding the needs of the awarding bodies.

**5.13** Take up of qualifications in the industry has been low which has been a barrier to the transfer of skills. Feedback received suggests that GoSkills is making good progress to address this issue. National Vocational Qualifications are becoming increasingly accepted and this is partly due to the work undertaken by GoSkills. In 2007-08 (the most recent period with finalised data) 11,400 National Vocational Qualifications were completed compared to 7,929 in the prior year and 6,529 in 2005-06. In 2007-08, the number of Vocational Qualification Certificates completed was 7,400 compared to 4,457 in the prior year.

**5.14 Apprenticeships** are not popular in the sector because the funding available is focused on young people and there are barriers to entry for people under a certain age for a large number of jobs in the sector. GoSkills is working with the National Employer Service which is proactive in apprenticeships. The National Employer Service has a remit to target companies with 500 plus employees and is relatively well resourced. However, it does not have the sector background and this is where GoSkills can add value by supporting the brokers and giving them credibility with the employers in the sector.

**5.15** There are approximately only 500 apprenticeships currently across the Passenger Transport sector. The apprenticeship frameworks cover the majority of sectoral occupations at Levels Two and Three, although several of the frameworks are not blueprint compliant. Where there is employer demand GoSkills is developing the frameworks to ensure that they become compliant with the blueprint. GoSkills is also developing apprenticeships in niche areas where there is employer demand, for example, in the area of aviation firefighters.

**5.16** GoSkills is involved in three **14-19 Diplomas**: languages, travel and tourism and engineering. The SSC is leading on the languages diploma, which is due to go live in September 2011. The languages diploma will be taught by a consortium of schools, colleges, universities and employers within local areas. GoSkills is working with CILT (the National Centre for Languages) on the languages diploma. GoSkills was heavily involved in the travel and tourism diploma, leading the project in its first year.

**5.17** Involvement with **Higher Education** providers is limited due to the nature of the sector. There is more scope for working with **Further Education** providers, for example, on transport planning. GoSkills is liaising with institutions to develop a foundation degree. It is also in discussions with the Association of Colleges to identify college champions in English region. GoSkills has developed different strategies for Further Education to differentiate between England and the Devolved Administrations. In England, when Train to Gain was first initiated, GoSkills challenged the supply side in each region to form consortia in order to bid for Train to Gain contracts. Regular meetings with colleges and training providers along with Train to Gain brokers take place within the regions. In Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland, funding regimes are different and GoSkills deals directly with target colleges.

**5.18** The Qualifications team has sufficient capacity and expertise with specialists in the key areas: apprenticeships, 14-19 Diplomas, National Occupational Standards and National Vocational Qualifications.

### Strengths

- National Occupational Standards work feeds into National Vocational qualifications which are valued by the sector.
- Research which is regarded as high quality by the sector.
- Easy accessibility of research and Labour Market Intelligence through website.
- Experienced Qualifications and Standards team and evidence they are respected by stakeholders and employers.
- Partnership working with awarding bodies.
- 14-19 Diploma development.

### Areas for Improvement

- Awareness of research.
- Country factsheets on website based on old data.
- Concerns over quality of Labour Market Intelligence for Wales.
- The SSC needs to communicate its new qualifications and credit framework timetable to ensure all stakeholders are comfortable with GoSkills' ability to meet the Government set deadline.
- Continue to develop apprenticeship frameworks so that they are blueprint compliant when demanded by employers.

## Part Six

### SSC Sector Specific Solutions

The SSC can demonstrate a compelling employer offer which addresses sector skill priorities, including cross sector skills, with defined routes to market.

**6.1** GoSkills' focus is on partnership working and brokering solutions between sector stakeholders. This was cited as a key strength by interviewees. Its sector specific solutions are based on research and employer consultation and its routes to market are appropriate to the sector. Access to the SSC's services was discussed with employers and other stakeholders. The consensus feedback indicated that the services provided by GoSkills are easy to access. GoSkills delivers national solutions based on sector changes, for example, the work undertaken on Passenger Carrying Vehicle Driver Certificate of Professional Competence ('Driver CPC'). It also delivers local solutions generated from employer consultations, which are then rolled out across the regions and nations as appropriate. An example of this is the Taxi Pre-Employment Project, which was developed to get unemployed people into paid taxi driver roles.

**6.2** There is evidence that GoSkills' sector specific solutions are driven by employer research and feedback. Interviewees believed that GoSkills is addressing the skills gaps in the sector appropriately. The **Sector Skills Agreement** sets out priorities for the sector. There is a sector skills agreement tailored to each of the four nations, which underpins its delivery plans.

**6.3** GoSkills' main focus is to act as an advisor and broker to the sector, deliver solutions through partners and influence stakeholders. The SSC only delivers solutions when it sees a gap in the sector. It is comfortable allowing stakeholders to develop their own solutions with the SSC acting as a conduit between the employers, training providers, awarding bodies and funding agency as appropriate. This role as broker and advisor received positive feedback in many of the interviews with employers and other stakeholders.

**6.4 Partnership working** is important to GoSkills in developing and implementing its sector specific solutions. For example, there has been successful partnership working with JobcentrePlus and local colleges on Taxi Pre-Employment Project. This a sector specific solution whereby GoSkills has liaised with Jobcentre Plus, local colleges and local taxi firms to arrange preemployment training for prospective taxi drivers amongst the unemployed. The taxi firms guarantee anyone completing the preemployment training an interview for a paid taxi driver position. Positive feedback was received from JobcentrePlus on the success of the initiative.

**6.5** As part of the reorganisation following the Serco review, the SSC implemented a system, whereby a specific initiative, such as basic skills or women into work, is led by a named champion. This has improved communication across the different regions and enables learning from one region to be shared more easily across the others. The aim is that it prevents duplication and allows the champion to develop best practice and help roll out the solutions nationally. The Taxi Pre-Employment Project above is a good example of where a solution was developed at a local level and then rolled out in other regions, where there was demand. As the reorganisation took place less than 12 months ago, this is an area where the SSC would expect to see further improvement.

**6.6** A further example of a solution being developed in response to employer research is the work GoSkills has performed to develop basic skills for baggage handlers. Many employees in this role lack basic numeracy and literacy skills. This is being addressed by GoSkills through the development of initial assessment tools which determine whether an individual has a numeracy or literacy need, and through the development of learning materials.

**6.7** GoSkills also works in partnership with a number of other SSCs, including Skills for Logistics, SEMTA and People 1st, to work on cross sectoral solutions. Areas of partnership working include: research, 14-19 Diplomas, Driver CPC and The Games 2012. GoSkills is involved in several initiatives connected to **The Games 2012**, focused on three key areas: developing customer service; disability access; and languages.

**6.8** Positive feedback was received from employers and other stakeholders on GoSkills' partnership working with other SSCs. The SSC has developed Memoranda Of Understanding with other SSCs and stakeholders. For example, a Memorandum Of Understanding is in place with Skills for Logistics. GoSkills works closely with Skills for Logistics and the two SSCs have set up the Joint Approvals Unit for Periodic Training. This is a sector specific solution for Driver CPC; the Joint Approvals Unit for Periodic Training manages the approvals process for both training centres and courses on behalf of the Driving Standards Agency.

**6.9** One of the key **routes to market** for the SSC is through its partners. GoSkills also has its own direct routes to market through its network of regional and national managers and its website. GoSkills also produces a quarterly magazine, Ongoing, which has a circulation of 5,000. The magazine highlights sector issues and directs the reader to more information, for example, on the internet. Delivery routes appear appropriate to the sector; employers commented that the solutions are easy to access.

**6.10** Due to a lack of initial employer interest, GoSkills decided that historically a **National Skills Academy** was not an appropriate route to market for the sector, as a proposition would need to demonstrate employer engagement, additionality and sustainability. Where individual employers or stakeholders have considered bids for national skills academies, GoSkills has provided advice. GoSkills would support a bid where there is evidence of employer demand as it is currently in rail engineering.

**6.11** Prior to the development of sector compacts, the SSC worked successfully with the Learning and Skills Council to unlock **Train to Gain** funding for the self employed in England. This has resulted in thousands of taxi and private hire drivers across England taking Level Two qualifications and improving their basic skills. Positive feedback was received from stakeholders involved in the Train to Gain process, such as skills brokers, on the role of GoSkills in this process. A substantial bid has recently been made by GoSkills for a Train to Gain compact for the sector. Some employers interviewed noted that funding regimes are complex and they would welcome more assistance from GoSkills around utilising funding available. GoSkills acknowledges it has more work to do to educate employers on the return on investment from training and to encourage training even where funding isn't available.

**6.12** One of GoSkills strategic objectives is to promote the Passenger Transport sector as a career of choice. The SSC has a dedicated full time employee to this area and other staff also are involved through the development of Diplomas, for example. A new careers website has been developed by GoSkills and is due for launch in June 2009. GoSkills has developed career pathways which start at the industry level and can then be broken down from entry level to senior jobs. The target market for the website is at the basic skills level, the largest market of employees for the Passenger Transport sector. The website will represent the first source of structured information on careers for the sector as a whole. It will be publicised through the new careers newsletter and Ongoing magazine. The SSC also plans to promote the website through stakeholders such as JobcentrePlus.

**6.13** In response to employer demand, GoSkills set up a working group to develop solutions to the challenges faced by the Passenger Transport sector in the area of **management and leadership**. This group has now been established for approximately three years and meets quarterly. One of the main outputs to date is the completion of piece of research in this area. From this the group concluded that, within the sector, there was not sufficient employer demand for management and leadership training or tools to be tailored to the sector. Therefore, rather than develop new products, the SSC decided to signpost to generic management and leadership tools, for example, through LearnDirect, within its members website. The research did highlight a skills gap in relation to business enterprise which was more specific to the sector due to the legal and regulatory nature of passenger transport and the large number of small businesses in the sector. The SSC has linked with the Small Firms Enterprise Development Initiative to look at these areas and currently provides signposting to relevant tools within its website.

**6.14** GoSkills has played a key role in helping employers understands and acts on the new legislation, for example, on the need of a **Passenger Carrying Vehicle Driver Certificate of Professional Competence** ('Driver CPC') which has been implemented due to new EU legislation. A set of guidance materials has been produced by GoSkills including an employer guide. GoSkills has obtained funding from the Scottish Executive to work with bus and coach operators in Scotland on a project aimed at overcoming the apprehension that many older professional drivers feel about the Driver CPC. A sector specific solution was developed to deliver the training associated with Driver CPC in remote parts of Scotland. Distance learning was arranged with tutor support in a manner

that complies with the conditions of the legislation. This solution is now being considered for other remote parts of the UK and is subject to the formal approval of the Driving Standards Agency.

**6.15** GoSkills has been active on implementing the **Skills Pledge**, for example, by developing the Pledgometer. Employers in the Passenger Transport sector were amongst the first to sign up to the agreement. We received positive feedback on the level of publicity GoSkills had generated on the Skills Pledge.

**6.16** GoSkills has established a successful annual awards programme, Go for Excellence, which is now in its fourth year. The aim of the scheme is to recognise excellence and act as a mechanism for raising the profile of apprenticeships and promoting them across the sector. Employers from the Bus, Aviation and Rail industries contributed to the design of the scheme and GoSkills secured sponsorship for the awards from awarding bodies and the Learning and Skills Council.

**6.17** GoSkills also supported two sector employers to achieve awarding organisation status by helping them to develop their internal structures and the expertise to develop and award qualifications. These employers were two of the initial three businesses to become awarding organisations.

**6.18** Both employers have been invited to attend the relevant awarding body forum (i.e. Aviation and Rail) and both now participate in meetings to discuss sector qualifications and future plans.

**6.19** GoSkills has a small revenue stream from its voluntary **membership** scheme. The SSC is considering how it can improve the membership offering and increase membership and contribution. GoSkills produced a DVD highlighting the implications of the Disability Discrimination Act 2006 for taxi drivers. The Public Carriage Office bought 80,000 copies of this DVD. Other DVDs produced by GoSkills have been praised for their high quality, for example, the award-winning "Diversity in the Workplace" DVD.

**6.20** GoSkills continues to seek opportunities to develop initiatives in response to sector need and has several other projects in the pipeline. For example, GoSkills is developing an initiative to improve the integration of passenger journeys. This covers many areas relating to passenger transport, for example, disability access and customer service. This project is in its early stages. This was cited as an example of GoSkills being able to look across the needs of the Passenger Transport sector as a whole.

**Strengths**

- Work around Passenger Carrying Vehicle Driver Certificate of Professional Competence has been well received by the sector.
- Partnership working with other SSCs and wider stakeholders.
- Effective broker and advisor role in the regions and nations.
- Skills awards programme, “Go for Excellence” has been running for four years and has received growing support from the industry.
- Train to Gain funding being made available to self employed people.
- Taxi Pre-Employment Project developed in response to stakeholder and operator demand.

**Areas for Improvement**

- Roll out of integrated passenger journey concept.
- Continue to look at where local solutions can be effectively rolled out across the regions and nations.
- Continued development of membership offer.
- Continue to develop ways to encourage employers to undertake training without attached funding.

## Part Seven

### SSC Results and Impacts

The SSC has set ambitious and realistic targets in relation to skills priorities of the sector which are used to measure the direct results and shared impacts of SSC products, services and solutions.

**7.1** To monitor its strategy, the SSC has put in place performance measures. The results in the second year of the five year strategy, however, suggest these performance measures may not be stretching. Through improvements to its performance management system, the SSC now has a clear thread linking its strategic goals to its operational plans and objectives for its staff. GoSkills can point to some significant impacts in terms of influencing how new legislation would be delivered and leveraging funding to be used by employers. It now needs to improve its evaluation to be able to evidence the return on investment in skills within the sector.

**7.2** During the last 12 months GoSkills has developed its performance management system so that for 2009-10 there is a clear link from the strategic objectives down through the operational plans to individuals' objectives. It also takes into account the **requirements of the UK Commission for Employment and Skills**.

**7.3** The priorities for the four nations for 2009-10 are set out in the **Delivery Plans**, which replace the Sector Skills Agreement action plans. The delivery plans align with the five strategic objectives set out in the Strategy and with the 13 skills priorities laid out in the Sector Skills Agreement. The performance monitoring against these plans is included in the overall corporate reports to the Board.

**7.4** GoSkills has set annual **key performance indicators** for its UK operational plan. These indicators are action based and do not all have smart targets. Against each strategic objective, however, the SSC has set a mixture of output and outcome targets, which it refers to as its performance measures.

**7.5** Each of these performance measures contains an annual milestone target for each year of the strategy. The results in the second year of the five year strategy suggest that the performance measures are not stretching. There is currently second year data available for seven of the 12 performance measures. Of these seven measures, six have been exceeded and one has been missed. The data for the remaining five targets is currently not available, but three have been assessed against proxy measures, which also suggest the SSC will exceed these targets. Three of the targets have been significantly exceeded and the SSC has provided explanations for this. Following the results, the Board will need to revisit the level of its targets going forward.

**7.6** On a quarterly basis the SSC reports performance against its key performance indicators to the Board. As the indicators do not contain smart targets, the performance report is based on activity in the quarter and is narrative in style. There is, however, a traffic light system, which highlights to the Board if there are any significant threats to achieving the actions. The Board receives an annual report against its performance measures.

**7.7** The Board receives a large quantity of performance information with no overall summary. The Board does not receive a dashboard or balanced scorecard, which would provide it with an overview of progress against the key strategic and operational objectives and help provide focus.

**7.8** The SSC is aware of the importance of evidencing the impact of its work across the sector, although it does not include **impact measures** within its performance management information. On 20 May 2009, GoSkills will launch its first “Economic Impact Report” by presenting it to the House of Commons. The report gives examples of where GoSkills believes its work is having an impact on the sector, but also identifies the need for further evaluation of work to be able to prove evidence this impact. As part of its planning for 2009-11, the SSC is looking at how it can evaluate its impact against each of its strategic objectives.

**7.9** GoSkills has undertaken a limited number of evaluation projects to date, but it has developed an **evaluation strategy**. The aim of the strategy is that evaluation becomes embedded. It is intended that evaluation will be incorporated into each project proportionate to its scale and importance and lessons shared across the organisation.

**7.10** As discussed in previous sections, GoSkills has managed to gain strategic influence and develop some innovative solutions. Three of Goskills’ largest impacts are listed below:

- GoSkills worked with the Learning Skills Council to provide Train to Gain funding for the self employed. This was the first funded qualification route developed in England for the Taxi and Private Hire sectors. This has led to thousands of self employed drivers undertaking Level Two training. The SSC plans to undertake further work to evaluate the impact of this intervention. This was noted as a key impact by a number of the stakeholder and employer interviewees.
- The main impact that employers and stakeholders raised within the interviews was GoSkills role in influencing the Passenger Carrying Vehicle Driver Certificate of Professional Competence. GoSkills influenced its implementation to ensure it fitted the Passenger Transport sector; revised the relevant National/ Scottish Vocational Qualifications to embed the new training syllabus to minimise duplication and maximise funding opportunities; and helped operators to become approved as Periodic Training Centres of which over 60 have achieved the status so far.

- The sector tended to have a low uptake of qualifications compared to other sectors, but there has been a significant increase in the number of qualifications being completed. For example, a major rail operator cited the work GoSkills has undertaken on National Vocational Qualifications as having a significant impact on its qualification policy. Prior to the involvement of GoSkills, the employer believed that the National Vocational Qualifications available were not fit for purpose. This meant that most employees did not get put on to a National Vocational Qualification programme. GoSkills has worked with the employers, and others in the sector, to tailor the qualifications to the relevant roles. Consequently, this employer now puts all of its trainees through an NVQ programme and completes over 1,000 National Vocational Qualifications per annum.

#### **Strengths**

- The development of its “Economic Impact Report”.
- Clear link between objectives, targets and programmes.
- Integration with staff development and objectives.

#### **Areas for improvement**

- Positive feedback received of projects undertaken at a regional and national level.
- Implement the evaluation strategy.
- Develop a form of dashboard or balanced scorecard as part of the performance reporting to the Board.
- The Board needs to review how stretching the current targets are.
- A number of the key performance indicators do not contain smart targets.

# Technical Annex

## Performance Assessment Methodology

### Background

The National Audit Office (NAO) has undertaken this Independent Performance Assessment of GoSkills at the request of the UK Commission of Employment and Skills.

It has undertaken the assessment in accordance with the assessment framework set out in the relicensing framework for Sector Skills Councils published by the UK Commission for Employment and Skills.

The purpose of the Assessment Framework is to assess the capacity and capability of the Sector Skills Council against four key themes:

- The SSC is employer led, has the confidence and support of employers in its sector and is a strategically and operationally effective organisation;
- The SSC provides a clear, credible and coherent voice for employers on the skills and qualification needs of the sector backed by high quality Labour Market Information, standards and qualification development;
- The SSC can demonstrate a compelling employer offer which addresses sector skill priorities, including cross sector skills, with defined routes to market; and
- The SSC has set ambitious and realistic targets in relation to skills priorities of the sector which are used to measure the direct results and shared impacts of SSC products, services and solutions.

Each key theme has a number of key tests and assessment questions which we have used to scrutinise the evidence across the four nations and prepare our report.

### Evidence

The Commission asked us to conduct our reviews to a very tight timetable and with the least burden on the Sector Skills Council.

We reviewed Sector Skills Council generated evidence for a period of two weeks before collecting evidence more directly from staff, employers and local stakeholders during a one week site visit to the Sector Skills Council. During this week we conducted a number of interviews and focus groups and observed meetings.

We chose a random sample of employers to interview, ensuring we covered as far as possible the full range of Council footprint. We also invited comments from employers and other stakeholders through our and the UK Commission's website. To measure the wider reach and engagement of the footprint, we examined the results of the Sector Skills Development Agency's 2007 census.

We collected information centrally from:

- The UK Commission for Employment and Skills.
- Central Government departments.
- Each of the Devolved Administrations through visits to Belfast, Cardiff and Glasgow.
- The Regional Development Agencies.
- The Learning and Skills Councils.
- Skillsplus UK (Local Government Employers).
- Awarding bodies.

To make our assessment we also reviewed a wide range of internal evidence including:

Expressions of Interest, Strategic Plans, Business Plans, Board Constitution, minutes and attendance, Audit and Remuneration minutes, Operational plans, National and Regional plans, Sector Skills Agreements, Research Strategies, capacity and capability reviews, customer and staff satisfaction surveys, complaints procedures, SQS and SQRP strategies, Sector Skills Action Plans, Labour Market Intelligence and plans, Employer Engagement Strategies, Take-up statistics, Stakeholder surveys, International Research data, Website materials, Memoranda of Understanding, Compact arrangements, stakeholder maps, performance review records, market assessments and external audit reports.

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