

IET skills and demand in industry

2021 survey

Examining the current skills challenges, identifying barriers and the future skills needed.

The Institution of Engineering and Technology (IET) carries out an annual skills survey of engineering employers in the UK. In 2021 we focused on the current skills challenges employers are facing, identify barriers to building the supply of the needed skills and the skills that will be needed in future.

This flyer presents the key facts, themes and recommendations from the full survey.

Key facts and findings

Current workforce profile

- 27%** report that their UK staff is mostly high skilled (university level or higher).
- 28%** report that they are mostly intermediate skilled (A-Level, NVQ 3 level, apprenticeships).
- 14%** have a UK staff that is generally lower skilled (GCSEs, NVQ level 2, basic skills or lower).
- 26%** report that their firm generally has a range of skills levels.

Workforce skills

- 67%** of those who are experiencing an internal skills gap report gaps in engineering or technical skills.
- 44%** report gaps in these skills at a technician or skilled craft level.
- 41%** report gaps in these skills at a professional level.
- 36%** report gaps in these skills at operative or semi-skilled levels.

Applicant's skills

- 63%** of employers who think applicants lack technical skills continue to say they are missing specialist skills/knowledge.
- 49%** of employers who do not have soft skills continue to think they lack teamwork.
- 71%** of engineering employers who think applicants are lacking in technical skills say that it is specialist skills/knowledge needed for the role that is likely to be lacking.
- 33%** say that complex problem-solving skills specific to the situation are the concern.

Diversity in the workforce

3 in 10 have taken action to improve the diversity of their engineering/technical workforce across gender (33%) or ethnicity (30%).

Barriers to sustainability

Of those with a sustainability strategy,

- 81%** think their organisation needs additional skills in order to deliver it.
- Only **20%** of businesses are upskilling their current workforce to improve their sustainability.

Areas of growth

A third of engineering employers say the following skills are important for future growth in the next five years:

- Design and manufacturing **36%**
- Energy and environmental sustainability **35%**

Key recommendations

Engineering employers are aware that they are responsible for providing training to upskill their workforces as well as improving diversity. However, there are some barriers that must be overcome. Based on the results of this survey, we have highlighted the following key action areas:

Current workforce needs:

1. Investment in upskilling employees should be a priority.

Engineering employers should ensure that they have a formal workforce development strategy and upskilling programs.

2. Apprenticeships should be leveraged both internally and externally.

Apprenticeships can be used to grow talent among current employees, equipping individuals with new skills and knowledge to address skills shortages.

Gaining skills:

3. Training can build resilience, but preparedness is key.

Employers should be forward-looking and ensure employees are well-trained throughout their employment, before the point of crisis.

4. Engineering employers should champion multiple areas of diversity in their workforce.

Diverse employees bring with them a variety of perspectives and skillsets. While some progress has been made, more can be done – particularly in an environment where engineering employers are looking towards recruitment to address their skills gaps.

Skills for sustainability:

5. Sustainability should be embedded within current workforce planning.

As employers recognise that sustainability will grow in importance over the next few years, the skills needed for sustainability should be central to any current recruitment strategy.

Looking to the future:

6. Future skills need addressing now.

Improving skills within the workforce should be addressed in the current moment to avoid employers becoming uncompetitive or unprepared to deal with future challenges.

7. Employers should work with educators to improve the skills pipeline.

Employers who engage with educators have the opportunity to shape the skills pipeline for the industry.

For further information and to read our full survey, visit theiet.org/skills

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