

UKCES Employer Skills Survey 2013: Scotland findings

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In the run-up to the 2014 Commonwealth Games in August, attention has focused on one high-profile gap on the starting line. Usain Bolt made headlines by announcing he would not be coming to Glasgow, intending instead to focus on the World Championships and preparation for Rio 2016. He's now thrilled athletics fans by changing his mind.

While this potential vacancy has been filled, vacancies elsewhere in Scotland are worth paying attention to. The UK Commission for Employment and Skills released the findings from its UK Employer Skills Survey for Scotland on 7th July. It found that vacancies have risen since 2011, giving a clear sign that the economy is getting back on track. But it also showed some signs for caution amid the optimism, with the increase in vacancies coinciding with an increase in skills shortages are up.

Putting some numbers on those headlines, there were 10,000 more vacancies in 2013 than 2011, an increase of 22%. Vacancies caused by a shortage of skills ('skills shortage vacancies', or SSVs) had increased by 60%. So there are potentially concerning problems for some businesses getting hold of the skills they need.

While these shortage vacancies have increased, they are concentrated in some industry sectors and particular occupations. These sectors and occupations have changed little since 2011 but instead have persisted. And, although the numbers of SSVs can appear relatively small, because they're concentrated and persistent they have real impacts on businesses. Worryingly, these were most concentrated in enabling sectors of the economy, ones that support growth elsewhere: 42% of businesses in transport and communications had an SSV, as did 35% of businesses in manufacturing.

Skills of staff in the workplace showed some positive news. The proportion of businesses that said they had employees that were not fully proficient fell slightly, from 21% in 2011 to 19% in 2013. That's good news – and there was more good news in that the proportion of employees being trained increased. You'd expect those two things to go hand-in-hand.

So what does this mean for businesses? Whether you're wanting to break records or just keep up with the pack it shows that focusing on the skills of your staff is more important than ever. If you aren't training your staff, these results show that your competitors probably are training theirs. And you don't need to be Usain Bolt to see the results of more training.

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