



Training in Britain

First Findings from the Skills and Employment Survey 2012

Francis Green, Alan Felstead, Duncan Gallie, and Hande Inanc

HEADLINES

Good quality and extensive training opportunities are essential for increasing the skills of the workforce. This report tracks what has been happening in Britain's workplaces in recent years.

- The volume of training has fallen: the proportion of British workers engaged annually in more than ten days' training declined from 38% in 2006 to 34% in 2012. This fall is especially concentrated among women.
- There have been no changes between 2006 and 2012 in the extent of certification of training or in its perceived contribution to skills enhancement. But fewer people are satisfied with the training they receive, and fewer report that their training helps them to enjoy their job more.
- The quality of training, like its volume, is greater for those workers with more prior education; this gradation reinforces inequality.
- There is a rising demand by workers at all levels of education to receive workplace training.

The Skills and Employment Survey is funded jointly by the Economic and Social Research Council and the UK Commission for Employment and Skills through the ESRC Centre for Learning and Life Chances in Knowledge Economies and Societies (LLAKES) which acts as the host institution. It is directed by Alan Felstead (Cardiff University and Visiting Professor at the Institute of Education) in collaboration with Duncan Gallie at the University of Oxford and Francis Green at the Institute of Education.

1. The Importance of Workplace Training

It is widely held that training for young people and ongoing lifelong learning are highly important in 21st century economies and societies. Training is an essential stage in young people's transitions from education into work. Ongoing lifelong learning is needed, both as people progress through different stages of their careers, and as new technologies and ways of organising work emerge. Technologies linked to computing and organisational forms such as teamworking have become pervasive across industries and occupations; they continue to transform skill requirements. According to the thesis of the 'knowledge economy', the need for ongoing skill formation is high and rising.

Training is also looked to for providing opportunities across the spectrum of society, so that even those who have had fewer educational chances can get on in the labour market. Thus, in principle, training is one of the tools for supporting a greater degree of social inclusion. Unfortunately, training is often unsuccessful in this regard, with opportunities being concentrated among the more highly educated and relatively scarce among disadvantaged groups.

What matters is not only the volume of training that workers receive, but its quality – the extent to which it is effective at raising workers' skills broadly considered. Some workers receive training that not only improves their technical capabilities but also embeds them further into an occupational community, helps them to be more thoughtful or innovative in their work, and enables them to work more independently. Other forms of training and learning are more mechanical and restrictive, ticking rather mindless boxes. Such contrasts have been evident in all types of training in Britain, but quality concerns have figured prominently in discussions concerning apprenticeships and other forms of training for young people.

Though most training for those in employment is provided by employers, all of society has an interest in the success of training in Britain. Trade unions have, in particular, been active in supporting training through Union Learning Representatives. Analysts and policy-makers need to know what has been happening to the volume and quality of training.

2. Previous Evidence

With the onset of the economic crisis at the end of 2008 it was feared that workplace training might become a casualty. Fortunately it turned out that there was no collapse in training in the recession. Many employers were unwilling or unable to reduce their training effort owing to commercial or regulatory requirements. However, looking over the long term, whereas there was a steady increase in training participation over a 4-week period during the 1990s, in 2003 the rate of training in Britain peaked at 15%. Thereafter training participation has slowly fallen to around 13% today. At the same time, there has been a reduction in the use of off-the-job training, a greater

use of training and learning while working, and training spells have shortened in length. Many employers have reported that they were 'training smarter' – in effect, trying to do the same with less money.

The above evidence comes from the Quarterly Labour Force Survey, several employer surveys, and from qualitative interviews with employers. There has been little evidence hitherto, however, about training quality – how much it varies between groups and whether it also has been changing. It might be that, with less off-the-job training and reduced participation, the quality has suffered.

3. The Skills and Employment Survey 2012: A Source of New Evidence

We investigated these issues using the Skills and Employment Survey 2012 (SES2012), which collected responses from working adults aged 20-65 years old in England, Scotland and Wales, interviewed in their own homes. The sample was drawn using random probability principles subject to stratification based on a number of socio-economic indicators. Only one eligible respondent per address was randomly selected for interview, and 49% of those selected completed the survey. Data collection was directed by ourselves and conducted by GfK NOP.

SES2012 is the sixth in a series of nationally representative sample surveys of individuals in employment. The 2006 and 2012 surveys covered people aged 20 to 65, and sampled a large number of respondents: 7,787 in 2006 individuals; and 3,200 in 2012. For each survey, weights were computed to take into account the differential probabilities of sample selection, the over-sampling of certain areas and some small response rate variations between groups (defined by sex, age and occupation). All of the analyses that follow use these weights.

4. Training Indicators

The Skills and Employment Survey 2012 and the 2006 Skills Survey provide consistent data on several aspects of training. This report focuses on the volume of training, its quality and future demand.

The volume of training is captured, first, by whether or not workers participated over the previous year in each of several explicitly-stated forms of training. Second, since the length of training can vary from an hour or so at one extreme to several months at the other, we also focus on participation in 'long training', defined as training that, overall, took place on more than 10 days per year. In 2012 close to a half of those getting any workplace training were receiving 'long training'.

Capturing the quality of training is more problematic. We do so by examining multiple indicators covering how workers experienced their training. While no one indicator alone should be relied upon, collectively they are informative about perceptions of whether

and how far skills have been improved through the training:

Indicators applying to the latest training spell

- whether the training is certified (that is, leads to a qualification)
- whether the training 'improved my skills' a lot
- whether the training 'made you think harder about different ways of doing your job' (a lot or a great deal)
- whether the training 'needs to be memorised off by heart' (a lot or a great deal).

Indicators applying to all training through the year

- whether the training 'helped me improve the way I work'
- whether the training 'made me enjoy my job more'
- whether very or completely satisfied with the training provided (the 7-point satisfaction scale ranged from 'completely satisfied' to 'completely dissatisfied').

To capture future demand respondents were asked 'How much do you want to get any training in the future'. We classify those who answered 'very much', from a 4-point scale ranging from there down to 'not at all', as having a perceived demand for future training.

5. Findings

Volume

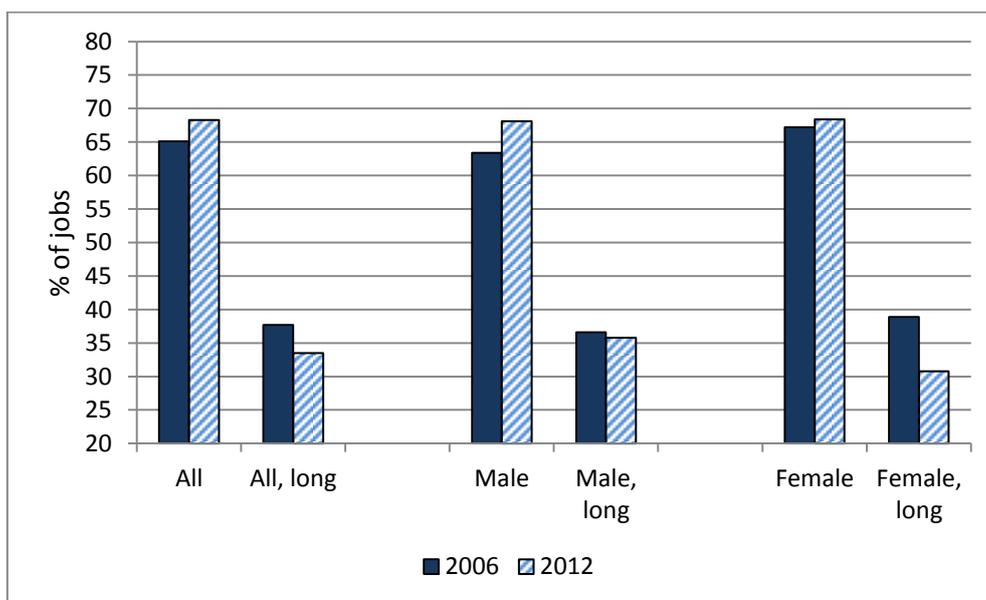
Figure 1 shows that annual training participation rose by three percentage points from 65% to 68% between 2006 and 2012. Underpinning this change is a particularly sharp rise in teach-yourself training and in the use of correspondence/internet training courses.

This change is countered by a reduction in the length of training typically undertaken. Among those training, the proportion training 'long' (for more than 10 days) fell from 59% to 51% over the period. Putting these trends together, Figure 1 also reveals that participation in long training declined by four percentage points from 38% to 34%. Notably, this decline is concentrated among women.

The fall in long training easily trumps the rise in short training, with the result that the volume of training fell between 2006 and 2012. Our best estimate is that average training days per worker year fell by just under a third (32%). We do not, however, attribute the decline in training volume to the recession partly because, as noted above, the decline in the 4-week participation rate recorded by the Quarterly Labour Force Survey set in well before the recession began.

Table 1 shows that participation in training varies very considerably, ranging from Health & Social Work (85%) at the top end to Hotels & Restaurants (44%) at the other. The proportions of workers doing 'long' training fell significantly in several industries, but rose in public administration and defence.

Figure 1: Training Participation in 2006 and 2012



Note. 'Long' training means more than 10 days over the year.

Table 1: Participation in Any Training and in Long Training, 2006 and 2012

<i>Industry:</i>	<u>Participation in Any Training (%)</u>		<u>Participation in Long Training (> 10 hrs) (%)</u>	
	<u>2006</u>	<u>2012</u>	<u>2006</u>	<u>2012</u>
Manufacturing	59.6	66.8	33.5	31.5
Construction	45.7	55.2	23.9	18.6
Wholesale & Retail	56.1	59.0	31.3	24.8
Hotels & Restaurants	44.2	43.6	21.0	16.2
Transport, Storage & Communication	53.5	61.4	28.5	25.9
Financial	81.8	84.8	54.6	57.6
Real Estate & Business Services	66.3	64.4	40.6	34.2
Public Administration & Defence	82.9	85.0	45.6	53.5
Education	79.3	80.7	47.6	39.0
Health & Social Work	75.7	85.0	46.5	45.3
Other Community, Social & Personal Services	56.1	57.5	35.8	26.3
<i>All Industries</i>	65.1	68.3	37.7	33.5

Quality

If the volume of training has declined, what has happened to its quality between 2006 and 2012? Figure 2 records a mixed picture. On one hand, there are few changes in the proportions for whom training is certified, improved skills a lot or improved the way of working. This finding seems consistent with recent qualitative reports from employers that they have found ways of increasing efficiency in their training function, and used them to reduce the time that their employees are not working productively at the

workplace. On the other hand, there has been a small but significant fall from 60% to 57% in the proportion of respondents who report that their training had raised the enjoyment of working, and a fall from 44% to 39% in the proportion who were very or completely satisfied with their training. Thus, while there certainly appears to have been no steps towards remedying the often-cited problem of low-quality training, whether or not the decline in training volume has been at the expense of quality remains uncertain.

Figure 2: Perceived Training Quality in 2006 and 2012

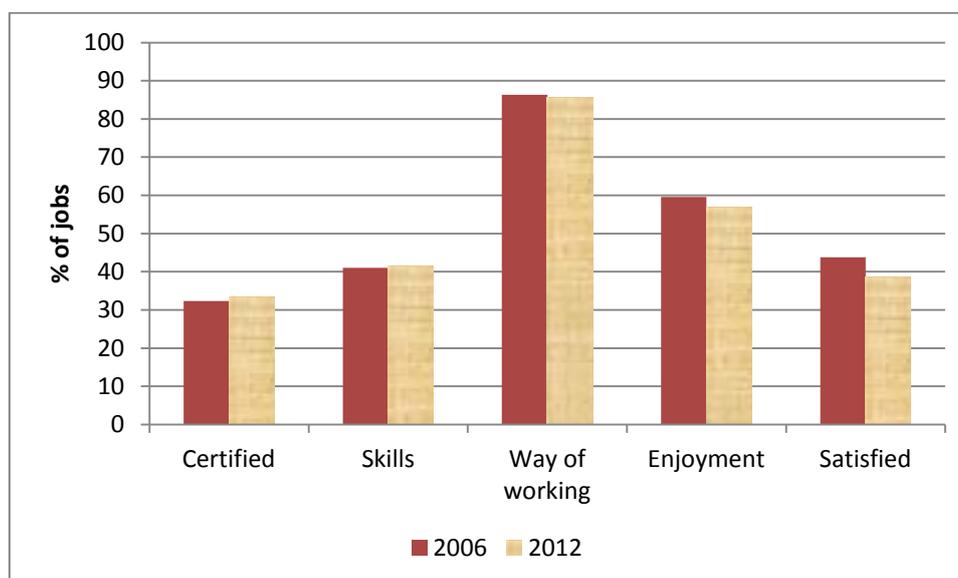
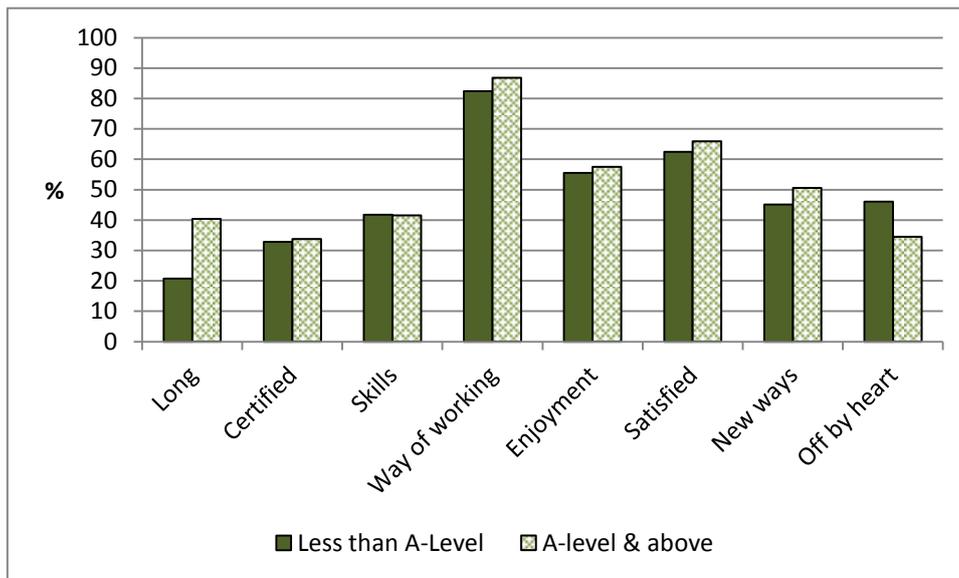


Figure 3 focuses on how both the quality and the volume of training are unequally distributed. It is an all-too-familiar finding that training often reinforces skill differences because it is concentrated among the better educated. Our evidence is that the high educated group receives twice as much long training as lower educated workers. Some differences are also found in the quality indicators. The high-educated workers more commonly report that the training improves their ways of working, helps them to enjoy the job, and leads them to new ways of

thinking about how to do their jobs; more of the lower educated workers report that the training needs to be learned off by heart. In contrast there are hardly any differences, according to prior education, in respect of the certification and perceived usefulness of training. Overall, the quality differences are not as striking as the volume differences; but it is unfortunate that quality variation appears to exacerbate the existing inequalities, rather than ameliorate them.

Figure 3: Perceived Training Quality by Prior Education Level, 2012

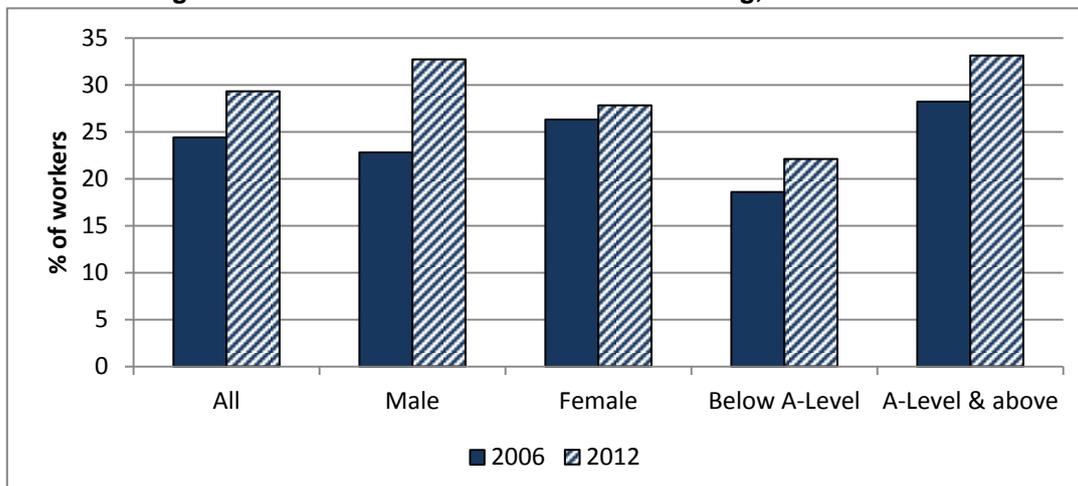


Future Demand

Finally, Figure 4 shows that the proportion of workers saying that they want training in the future has risen from 24% in 2006 to 29% in 2012. The rise took place for both high and low educated groups, but was concentrated among male workers. Though not

shown in the figure, this wish for future training is linked with having faced a training barrier in the past. For those who did not receive any training in 2012, the proportion wanting future training is much greater among those whose employer would not provide them with desired training than among those not facing such a barrier (37% compared with 16%).

Figure 4: Perceived Demand for Future Training, 2006 and 2012



6. Policy Implications

Training in the workplace is partly driven by the needs of individual workers. Yet it is employers who determine the need for training at each workplace, and who play an indispensable role in the provision of training and learning opportunities. Their decisions are partly driven by new technologies and forms of work organisation. Also greatly relevant is employers' orientation – whether more towards the long term, and whether more towards a high value-added approach with complex and dynamic product specifications. Training's variation among employers reflects their business strategies. Because training matters for the whole of society, not just for those in receipt of training, there is a continuing case for social engagement with employers over both the volume and quality of training.

In this light, the decline in the volume of training suggests that there could be a deterioration in

Britain's training effort. Given that it is unlikely that a decline in training is warranted in the contemporary economy, a renewed challenge to halt and reverse the trend is posed. Such a call is tempered by mixed evidence about whether the volume decline is harming the quality of the training experience. Quality is not easy to measure well and we have relied here on workers' own perceptions in a number of dimensions. Our findings imply that it will be important to monitor closely both the declining volume of training, and the ongoing quality of the training process, if long-term ambitions for raising workforce skills are to be fulfilled. The quality of training remains arguably too low and, like the volume of training, is skewed in favour of already-advantaged education groups.

Selected Recent Studies

Felstead, A, Green, F and Jewson, N (2012) 'An analysis of the impact of the 2008-09 recession on the provision of training in the UK', *Work, Employment and Society* 26(6): 968-986.

Felstead, A, Fuller, A, Jewson, N and Unwin, L (2009) *Improving Working as Learning*, London: Routledge.

Green, F (2013) *Skills and Skilled Work. An Economic and Social Analysis*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Hoque, K and Bacon, N (2011) 'Assessing the impact of Union Learning Representatives on training: evidence from a matched sample of ULRs and managers.' *Work, Employment and Society* 25(2): 218-233.

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LLAKES is an ESRC-funded Research Centre which investigates the role of lifelong learning in promoting economic competitiveness and social cohesion, and in mediating the interactions between the two. The Skills and Employment Survey 2012 was funded by the ESRC/UKCES Strategic Partnership (RES-241-25-0001), with additional support from the Wales Institute of Social and Economic Research, Data and Methods.

Author Affiliations: Alan Felstead – Cardiff University; Duncan Gallie and Hande Inanc – Nuffield College, Oxford; Francis Green – LLAKES, the Institute of Education.

This report may be cited as: Green, F, Felstead, A, Gallie, D, and Inanc, H (2013) *Training in Britain: First Findings from the Skills and Employment Survey 2012*, London: Centre for Learning and Life Chances in Knowledge Economies and Societies, Institute of Education.

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