Championing difference for a better workforce

Increasing diversity and inclusion in the WorldSkills UK Competitions

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TSIP | The Social Innovation Partnership

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Table of Contents

About the partners

WorldSkills UK

WorldSkills UK is a partnership between business, education and governments to accelerate young people's careers and break down barriers to employment. WorldSkills UK is dedicated to supporting the next generation of highly skilled professionals. It wants to ensure that its work is truly reflective of the society we live in, guaranteeing that all young people can access the best start in work and life. For 66 years,

WorldSkills UK has been a leading player in WorldSkills International, the global movement that brings 82 countries together through the biennial 'Skills Olympics'. Skills Competitions provide a form of accelerated development in which young people achieve greater technical excellence in their focus area, and develop transferable skills such as resilience, creative thinking, confidence and teamwork.

The Social Innovation Partnership

TSIP is a diverse team of technical and community specialists who are joining forces to drive social change. We support our partners to better understand the issues they care about and increase their positive impact on people and communities. We do research, design programmes, measure impact, and facilitate strategy, learning and co-production.

We lead with empathy and curiosity in order to really get to know our partners and build trusting relationships. Our approach is collaborative, participatory and enabling. We work across sectors and on the ground with groups that share our values.

This report was co-authored by Marion Brossard, Christina Floe, Tyler Fox, Keisha Simms and Fancy Sinantha of TSIP.

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Appendix 2 includes a full list of acknowledgements.

Foreword

"We need to have more diversity to create a wider range of role models for more of the next generation."

– Dr Neil Bentley–Gockman OBE

Dr Neil Bentley-Gockmann OBE
CEO, Worldskills UK

"...we believe that when young people succeed, we all succeed."

WorldSkills UK is all about helping more young people, whatever their background, get the best start in work and life through our programmes to inspire millions of young people to follow apprenticeships and technical careers and to help thousands develop higher level skills every year. However, we have failed over recent years, despite a range of initiatives, to live up to our ambitions to be as inclusive as possible in our work. We are determined to fix this. That's why we commissioned this research: to hold up a mirror to ourselves and deep dive into our organisation and network to better understand the challenges and opportunities to improve the diversity of the young people with whom we engage, so more and more young people get access to the opportunities we offer.

In doing so, we have re-examined why being more inclusive – helping more young people from all backgrounds – is so important to us. Firstly, is our charitable purpose: helping millions of young people reach their potential through our careers advice and Skills Competitions programmes. Our work has been proven to boost not just technical competence, but also self-confidence, resilience and life skills. We need to give as many young people as possible the opportunity to get the best start in work and life. Secondly, is the economic case for diversity: helping more young people prepare better for work so that employers will have more choice when recruiting, leading to more diverse and therefore more productive workplaces. So, we need to champion inclusion more with our

employer and education partners. And thirdly is our role of representing the best of UK skills systems at home and internationally: helping develop young people from across the UK up to world-class standards, inspiring others to follow in their footsteps. We need to have more diversity to create a wider range of role models for more of the next generation.

If we aren't being inclusive, we cannot be sure we are delivering on the virtuous circle created by these three core goals.

That's why I very much welcome this comprehensive and ambitious report encompassing all aspects of our role – as a careers and skills development network with global reach, as a convening platform for partners across the skills sector and as an employer – and the recommendations point to our potential to play a valuable leadership role. This report therefore does us a great service and we will digest with our partners and will respond to take action on all fronts.

I would like to thank The Social Innovation Partnership for its hard work on shining a light on the opportunities ahead, our advisory group for steering us in the right direction as this work has advanced and our fantastic team at WorldSkills UK who have embraced the challenges in this work – so that together we can help more and more young people succeed. Because we believe that when young people succeed, we all succeed.

Executive Summary

"[Diversity and inclusion has] the greatest of values – to strive to be open for all; for each to have the chance; for each to try to be the best version of themselves that is possible... at the end of the day we are all people"

– 2018 competitor

Everyone faces barriers to progress throughout their lives. For many, these barriers take the shape of discrimination, disability and disadvantage – barriers that manifest early and compound. Work on issues of social mobility, equity, diversity and inclusion is vital so that these barriers can be overcome. Opportunities for individuals to engage and to thrive need to be equalised in a proactive way to ensure that all are given the chance to succeed.

Like many organisations and competition organising bodies, WorldSkills UK and its partners recognise that there are barriers in its Skills Competition programme – barriers that both hinder diverse young people from taking part and disadvantage them during the Skills Competitions programme and beyond. WorldSkills UK is determined to address these challenges so that the UK's full spectrum of talent has the opportunity to participate and benefit from the experience.

This report sets out how WorldSkills UK can help lead the charge in progressing diversity and inclusion across the technical skills sector, and the Skills Competitions that it runs. Both the summary and report that follow are in two sections: an introduction which comprises the context, methodology and data that was collected during the research stage of the project and a focus areas section which builds on the barriers identified during the research to five areas for WorldSkills UK to focus on, supported by tangible recommendations.

Championing difference for a better workforce

Introduction

WorldSkills UK Competitions

Young people exit the Skills Competitions programme armed with the soft and hard skills that make them invaluable to employers.

WorldSkills UK is one of the leading national programmes preparing young people with the critical skills needed for the jobs of today and tomorrow. Young people exit the Skills Competitions programme armed with the soft and hard skills that make them invaluable to employers. Given this important role in developing and championing the UK and global workforce, WorldSkills UK wants to attract, develop, mentor, and sponsor the UK's most diverse and best young talent – improving not just the quality and diversity of its competitors and the inclusivity of the Skills Competitions, but also the economy (driving innovation, profitability, productivity and competitiveness) and society more broadly.[1]

Key to the operation of Skills Competitions are 25 Competition Organising Partners (COPs), who deliver the national competition cycle, and around 40 Training Managers and Performance Coaches who prepare competitors for international competition. A wider network of employers, colleges and training providers register young people for competitions and / or contribute funds, materials, other resources or time. This network is vital to the effective delivery of WorldSkills UK's objectives and its sustainability.

Research aims and methodology

This commitment to diversity and inclusion led WorldSkills UK to commission The Social Innovation Partnership (TSIP) to undertake an independent review of its Skills Competitions programme. WorldSkills UK's goal was to use this independent research to inform, influence and drive positive change in its Skills Competitions programme – focusing primarily on social mobility, BAME[i], women in Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM)/ Information and Communications Technology (ICT)/ Construction, LGBT+, individuals with SEN, and those from more deprived areas across the UK.

This report is based on:

- a review of existing practice and evidence as it relates to diversity and inclusion in WorldSkills UK's Competitions;

- **3,021 registrants'** data across the Skills Competitions programme;

- the voices and experiences of **697 stakeholders** (competitors, Skills Champions, teachers/ trainers, Principals, employers, Competition Organising Partners, Judges, Training Managers, and Performance Coaches);

- the insights from **four literature reviews** on how similar programmes and competitions address social mobility, diversity and inclusion

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i   Black, Asian and Minority Ethnicities – whilst we appreciate that the grouping of these ethnicities may be in of itself damaging, there were insufficient data to analyse the experiences of the independent groups.

What we mean by diversity and inclusion

For the purposes of this research diversity is interpreted in terms of the extent to which participants and partners are representative of the wider populations from which they are drawn, and inclusion in terms of the extent to which diverse individuals are recognised, made to feel welcome and appreciated. Diversity and inclusion have been analysed primarily through the lenses of gender, ethnicity, LGBT+, multiple deprivation levels, and national region.

Patterns seen within the Skills Competitions cycle to some extent reflect and are caused by broader trends – especially within the colleges, training providers and employers from which competitors are drawn. But WorldSkills UK also has the opportunity, by increasing diversity within the Skills Competitions, to contribute to a virtuous circle linking increased diversity with reduced stereotypes and increased participation in the technical skills sector.

The importance of diversity and inclusion

Promoting diversity and inclusion isn't just the right thing to do, there is increasing evidence that it makes good business sense.

Promoting diversity and inclusion isn't just the right thing to do, there is increasing evidence that it makes good business sense. As the demand for a more diverse workforce increases,

more evidence is emerging showing the true business case for inclusive practice: that greater diversity increases the likelihood of increased innovation, revenue, and productivity.[2]

The state of diversity across the nations

The United Kingdom is home to over 66 million people characterised by different ages, ethnicities, genders, sexualities, abilities, religions and socio-economic backgrounds.[3] For example, 1 in 7 people living in England come from an ethnic minority background;[4] 2% of people living in Wales identify as lesbian, gay or bisexual (data on trans and transgender populations are not

provided);[5] and among working-age adults specifically, around 18% of the UK identifies as having a disability.[6] The potential for the UK workforce to boast its diversity is undeniable. Yet, despite the diversity of the population, industries have had limited success ensuring these differences are included in their workforce.

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Diversity and inclusion in the technical skills and FE sector: the pipeline of competitors

Females comprise 58% of all FE learners, but only 7.8% are apprentices in Engineering and Manufacturing Technologies.

Our analysis looked at the 2.2million students aged 16-18 across colleges across the four nations of the UK in 2017-18[7] and showed that ethnic minorities (i.e. those not identifying as White British) make up 24%, 17% have a learning disability or difficulty and 17% claimed free school meals at age 15. Overall, 36% of FE learners live in an area in the most deprived Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) quintile, and 21% who paid for their course stated that it was difficult for them to meet the cost.[8] Females comprise 58% of all FE learners, but only 7.8% are apprentices in Engineering and Manufacturing Technologies.[9] According to a recent analysis report, only 7% of Principals in the UK are BAME – and three out of the nine regions in England have no BAME Principals whatsoever.[10]

Our analysis also looks at the additional 77,500 being educated through apprenticeships[11], and those in full-time and part-time employment in the technical skills sector. We noted that BAME young people are underrepresented in construction, IT and engineering, making up 25% of apprenticeship applicants, but only 10% of actual apprentices.[12] Underrepresentation is even more prominent for people from Asian backgrounds specifically, who make up only 4.3% of apprentices compared to 8% of the population.[13] When it comes to gender, as of 2018 only 7.4% of engineering apprenticeships were taken up by women and girls, and only 12.3% of all engineers in the UK were female.[14]

Diversity and inclusion in WorldSkills UK Competitions

While diversity clearly exists in the technical education sector, albeit with room for improvement, it is not filtering through sufficiently into WorldSkills UK Competitions. In 2018, 90% of WorldSkills UK competitors were White, 67% were male and only 5% identified themselves as having a disability or learning difficulty. The findings confirm that WorldSkills UK competitors are not fully representative of young people in the UK: they are overly weighted toward White British men without disability or special educational need (SEN).

Based on this data our focus areas and recommendations come from the perspective of:

- Women in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM)

- Black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) competitors

- Competitors with special educational needs (SEN)

- Competitors who are members of the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender plus (LGBT+) community (not represented below, as this information was not collected by WorldSkills UK in 2018)

- Competitors from disadvantaged backgrounds (as per Index of Multiple Deprivation [IMD] measures)

Focus areas for WorldSkills UK

This section sets out five key focus areas for WorldSkills UK to act on:

1. **Reaching and appealing to diverse individuals**

2. **Tackling stereotypes and preconceptions**

3. **Improving competitor support and reduce barriers to entry**

4. **Increasing and appreciating diversity and inclusion within WorldSkills UK, the Skills Competitions and its partners**

5. **Forming a clear vision and narrative around diversity and inclusion across WorldSkills UK and its partners**

Each focus area responds to the barriers that were uncovered in the analysis, listed below:

- **The registration process** means that tutors, trainers and employers are in a position of control over who is registered for the Skills Competitions – which is open to bias as well as good practice

- Such biases are problematic when students and apprentices are not otherwise aware of the Skills Competitions, and able to advocate for themselves to their tutors and employers; currently, limited **awareness of the WorldSkills UK opportunities** serves as a barrier

- Competitors currently **lack diverse role models within the WorldSkills UK Competition** professionals, which many have said they would have valued

- Competitors also reflected a **lack of diverse role models in the wider technical skills sector**, which can limit social mobility for those who do not see themselves represented

- Competitors can face **social and financial barriers** to participation, as well as during the Skills Competitions, such as lack of confidence, anxiety, lack of support from family, college or employer, or inability to afford the extra time to train

- The **language and narrative** around the Skills Competitions relating to 'excellence' and 'winning' can be a barrier to those who are not drawn to competitions, in particular for women, compared with language used around developing skills

At the end of each focus area section, we then provide recommendations for how WorldSkills UK can take steps to address these barriers. Pursuing these recommendations will take human and financial resources which may currently be outside the constraints of WorldSkills UK's funding, and which will likely require additional funding to support. Although these are aimed primarily at WorldSkills UK, they are also applicable as recommendations which other stakeholders could apply to their own organisations.

Understanding the data behind the five focus areas:

key demographics and survey responses around the 2018 WorldSkills UK Competitions

Skills Competition Judges were:

8%
BAME

10%
LGBT

20%
Female

4% with disability or SEN

98%
of competitors
had heard about the Skills Competitions through their tutor, trainer or employer

77%
of BAME Principals, tutors, training providers and employers agree that diversity is a current issue in the technical skills sector; compared with only

32%
of their White British peers

60%
of tutors and employers did not agree that their most skilled students were always able or willing to take part, suggesting that there are practical or motivational barriers to attracting the most skilled students to participate

23%
of tutors and trainers agreed that students' financial difficulties can prevent them from being able to participate

Surveyed Training Managers were:

7%
BAME

7%
LGBT

14%
Female

0% with disability or SEN

1. Reaching and appealing to diverse individuals

WorldSkills UK has the opportunity to increase diversity by addressing the potential for bias in the registration process: both by tapping into the full pool of individuals in the currently participating organisations, and by expanding its reach to more diverse areas of the UK, and into organisations not currently involved. Currently, 87% of competitors are directly registered by their FE colleges, employers, or other independent training providers (ITPs),[15] and 98% of competitors had heard about the Skills Competitions from their tutor or employer (as opposed to from WorldSkills UK directly or past competitors and peers).

There is a real risk with colleges, employers and training providers having this much influence over who hears about and registers in the Skills Competitions. Although there are many success stories of tutors' and employers' best efforts, when it comes to registering competitors, organisations may be operating on inconsistent or subjective selection

requirements. This means there is room for bias to impact decision-making.

There is therefore a case for **positive action** in making more people aware of the Skills Competitions. FE Colleges produced 78% of the 2018 competitors but many competitors came from the same colleges and institutions and are often not located in areas with diverse populations. Of the 14 Competition Organising Partners interviewed, six voiced the need for more local and bespoke engagement (competitions qualifiers, roadshows) in diverse regions.

As such, WorldSkills UK can help address participation barriers which exist both to colleges, training organisations and companies as a whole, and to the students and apprentices within them (see Figure 14).

2. Tackling stereotypes and preconceptions

One of the major means to promote and encourage diverse participation and access, is to contribute towards dismantling societal stereotypes around 'traditional' roles in skilled trades: i.e., perceptions of who is 'typical' within these skilled trades, which can carry outdated associations with White British men. Our research shows that a barrier to diverse competitors is the perceived 'second class' status of apprenticeships and technical skills or vocations. 36% of COPs queried believe that the reason certain skill areas are more diverse than others are a result of long-held stereotypes that permeate British culture and schooling.

These perspectives were echoed by Principals, tutors, and apprentice trainers, 85% of whom spoke about the difficulties they face in encouraging non-stereotypical participation in different skill areas. 23% mentioned having difficulty attracting BAME students to their skill sectors, but the majority (85%) mentioned gender differences, particularly around recruiting women to STEM skills or men to beauty or social care.

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Figure 14 *(from the main report)* **Conceptual diagram highlighting the barriers that organisations, and the learners within them, can face producing a filtering effect of who ultimately competes in the Skills Competitions**

Barriers that can exist between colleges and employers

Barriers that can exist within colleges and employers

All colleges and employers

All students

The filter should stop here

Colleges and employers that hear about the Skills Competitions

Students with the skills potential to compete

The filter should stop here

Colleges and employers that want to take part

Students who hear about the Skills Competitions

Colleges and employers that have the resources to send competitors

Students who want to compete

Students who are able to compete

3. Improving competitor support and reducing barriers to entry

Once competitors succeed nationally and prepare for international competitions, Training Managers, individual Performance Coaches and some financial support are provided. Yet this support is often inconsistent based on the location or skill focus and can be improved when it comes to the financial, emotional and wellbeing needs of competitors. The majority of 2018 competitors surveyed strongly agreed that they felt supported by their tutors, teachers, employers and family. However, registrants, tutors, trainers, and Competition Organising Partners (COPs) in our surveys and interviews all recognised the inconsistent support structures across the various stages of

the Skills Competition Programme. In particular, the research highlighted the impact of financial barriers – from initial engagement with the Skills Competitions through to the later stages of competing.

We also present the case for taking a hard look at the language used through the Skills Competition programme. Although WorldSkills UK may not be able to directly influence public perception, it can control the language that it uses to promote its work and ambitions. For instance, the terms 'competition' and 'excellence,' and the focus on 'medalling' may also be non-inclusive and 'culturally loaded', containing implicit messages for what a 'winner' would be like.

4. Increasing and appreciating diversity and inclusion within WorldSkills UK, the Skills Competitions, and its partners

...more could be done to get WorldSkills UK's positive and diverse branding out to more people.

The importance of role models and the impact of seeing oneself represented came out strongly in the research as a significant influence on competitors' interest, confidence and participation. In particular, those who had exposure to role models found it a powerful motivator; those who did not have this exposure, however, felt negatively impacted by the lack of relatable role models.

Tutors, trainers, and Judges all play an important part in modelling success. This is compounded by the fact that competitors lack diverse role models in the experts they see in the technical skills sector – especially in an environment where 92% of WorldSkills UK Judges and 93% of Training Managers are White British (based on 2018 Skills Competitions data).

In addition, many who were surveyed in the research said that more could be done to get WorldSkills UK's positive and diverse branding out to more people. This includes ensuring that marketing and communications materials are accessible to potential competitors. This is also about ensuring inclusivity within the competition journey: from appreciating the need for gender neutral rooms (for those who travel and stay overnight at competitions) and bathrooms to diversifying the offering around particular competitions (e.g. both European and Afro-Caribbean hairdressing).

Championing difference for a better workforce

5. Forming a clear vision and narrative around diversity and inclusion across WorldSkills UK and its partners

WorldSkills UK exists because of its strong partnerships and collaboration.

WorldSkills UK exists because of its strong partnerships and collaboration. The sheer volume of current partners and individuals involved in WorldSkills UK gives credence to its convening power and its potential to influence more partners and individuals to transform diversity and inclusion. WorldSkills UK LIVE, with the National Skills Competitions, brings together 70,000 visitors, including competitors, schools, employers, colleges and other stakeholders.

Within this network WorldSkills UK has the influence and convening power to shape what diversity and inclusion means across its partnerships. From a focus on learning (e.g. understanding that different structures require different changes and appreciating the journey equally to the end goal), to promoting and rewarding positive action, all the while effecting change internally and sharing it – positive shifts in diversity and inclusion are possible.

Aiming to facilitate learning, showcase best practice, to link up activity, perceptions and narratives and to award positive action on diversity and inclusion is an important first step. The natural follow-on for this is how WorldSkills UK leads the way on a global stage through WorldSkills International.

Recommendations

Based on these data and insights WorldSkills UK could transform culture and practice at home, amongst its partners and society more broadly by implementing the following recommendations: (for the full list of recommended actions, see Appendix 3: Recommendations with supporting actions):

Form new strategic partnerships with groups that can help achieve diversity and inclusion goals

By developing partnerships with government, business, and others who can financially sustain or endow the Skills Competitions and its competitors, WorldSkills UK can both emphasise and disseminate the business case for diversity and inclusion in the Skills Competition, and increase awareness of the Skills Competitions amongst students, young people, and apprentices

Launch a shared Commission for Diversity and Inclusion in the sector

WorldSkills UK has the opportunity to harness its partnerships to focus activity around diversity and inclusion in the technical skills sectors, including by involving young people in systems change across the FE sector.

Create tools and guidelines showcasing what works to support partners to achieve diversity and inclusion goals

In supporting its partners to deliver the Skills Competitions, WorldSkills UK can embed diversity and inclusion from the start, by providing platforms through which good practice can be showcased, encouraging colleges and employers to support peer mentoring, and increasing the breadth of research to improve this activity across the ecosystem.

Develop a shared vision and set targets for what diversity and inclusion in the Skills Competitions ought to look like

A common, shared vision for diversity and inclusion, alongside agreements with partners to set positive action and diversity targets can have widespread influence across the sector and the Skills Competitions.

Involve competitors more actively across the WorldSkills UK ecosystem

Competitors are the primary stakeholder of Skills Competition and could significantly influence inclusive processes through increased involvement: e.g. a diverse youth advisory board, or increased roles in the roadshows.

Establish consistency across all partners through standardising Skills Competition processes

Standardisation of certain processes can ensure both broad and specific commitment to inclusive ways of working, removing a risk of this inconsistency causing only increasing inclusion in certain partners, skills, or areas.

Target diverse areas of the UK

WorldSkills UK can improve its Skills Competitions by working with areas which are more diverse and can have more inclusive cultures, both to ensure that this influences the wider network and the competitor experience.

Lead by example in driving diversity and inclusion internally and in the Skills Competitions

The WorldSkills UK network and its Skills Competitions can only change with WorldSkills effecting that change internally, and sharing insight and learning from their experience. This has already started and can be continued and improved through integration of competitor feedback.

Provide signposting to quality diversity and inclusion training and support

Although WorldSkills UK does not have the financial capability to provide direct support, they are able to signpost their partners to quality training and induction, whilst increasing the support to their own staff (including Judges and Training Managers).

Adapt the communications and marketing strategy

A relatively quick win for WorldSkills UK centres around their marketing and comms strategy – including revisiting their brand as a Diversity and Inclusion Champion.

Conclusion

Sustaining progress around diversity and inclusion is difficult. It requires a level of long-term human and financial investment from existing and potential partners, especially to 'win the war on talent' and ensure persistent, systemic benefit. This report argues that this hard work is worthwhile – that commitment to inclusive practice provides invaluable benefits for people, for the sector and for the wider economy.

As a charity with a specific programmatic remit, WorldSkills UK's funding is limited in terms of outreach, sponsorship and other activities it can currently achieve. This report is also a megaphone to partners and potential funders: we all know that change is vital and urgent, and it requires significant long-term investment. The call to action is necessary for all.

Introduction

About this report

Much has been said about the importance of diversity and inclusion and the need to do better. This report aims to move beyond talk to drive meaningful and sustained change.

This report focuses on diversity and inclusion with reference to the Skills Competitions run by WorldSkills UK – a partnership between business, education, and governments which exists to accelerate the development of young people's technical and vocational skills from national to world-class standards. It does so by engaging individuals in Skills Competitions – competitions which not only provide an opportunity for those individuals to showcase their learning, but also takes them on an accelerated learning journey, providing opportunities to develop critical skills, attributes and behaviours valued by employers such as problem solving, self-reflection, time management and the ability to work under pressure. The competitions enable apprentices and students to get experience of using the skills they have learned in pressurised, time dependent environments, developing their skills to high levels of performance which will enable them to meet the demands of real-life workplaces. These competitions are wide-ranging, with skills from 3D digital game art to beauty therapy, cloud computing to forensics, carpentry to robotics, and more. The challenges of

diversity and inclusion that this report highlights are by no means unique to the Skills Competitions. By the same token, the recommendations in this report are applicable beyond WorldSkills UK.

The findings and recommendations presented in this report have been informed by existing research, feedback and evidence provided by WorldSkills UK, its partners and participants, as well as literature reviews and best practice examples from within this network and beyond.

This introduction provides an overview of key concepts, summarises the aims and scope for this report, and provides contextual information on WorldSkills UK Competitions, and the state of diversity and inclusion in the technical skills sector and more broadly.

Figure 1   **The simplified competitor journey**

Pre-registration

Colleges, training providers and employers can express an interest in taking part in the WSUK Skills Competitions

Colleges, training providers and employers can undertake pre-competition activity locally

Registration

Skills competition registration opens (March – April)

Competitors are registered by their college, training provider or employer (registrant or point of contact)

Local/Regional Activities/Heats

College, training providers and employers prepare and support competitors to take part in local or regional skills competitions , to gain place at National Qualifiers

National Qualifiers

Nation Qualifiers are held between April – July 2018

Competitors scoring the highest and above the threshold will gain a place at the National Finals

National Finals (LIVE)

Competitors at the national finals will compete for a place in Squad UK. The highest scoring competitors are awarded gold, silver or bronze medals

Optional: National LIVE competitors are invited to become Skills Champions, who promote the Skills Competitions around the UK

Skills Champions

Top 3 competitors under 25 (age capped)

Competitors who have reached the highest points in their chosen skills will receive further training and coaching via WSUK where they will be supported by a Competition Organising Partner, a Training Manager and a Performance Coach

UK Squad

Top 3 competitors under 25 (age capped)

Competitors undertake further training and can be invited to Team Selection events (March), where the highest scoring and assessed competitors gain a place in Team UK, and represent the UK at EuroSkills and/or WorldSkills International Competitions

Team UK
(International and European Competitions)

WorldSkills UK Competitions

...organisations are encouraged to use the early stages of the Skills Competitions to promote ambition and development for all students and apprentices...

WorldSkills UK Competitions aim to promote technical skills in the UK, and support and drive the development of students and apprentices. Skills Competitions are designed through their competitive nature to provide motivation for development; allow students and apprentices to benchmark their skills against their peers; and help identify each competitors' strengths and weaknesses for development and progression (among others). To register to compete within the UK, a competitor only needs to be enrolled in a technical skill within education or apprenticeship; or, to have been employed in this skill for three years or less; and to have the support of their organisation. Within the Skills Competitions, a competitor's 'journey' is illustrated in 'Figure 1' on the preceding page.

The Skills Competitions themselves fall under four main sector categories: Engineering & Technology; Construction & Infrastructure; Health, Hospitality & Lifestyle; and Digital, Business & Creative. As such, 'skills' covers a wide variety of traditional versus emerging industries; manual and technical labour; industry qualification requirements; and sector categories. There is also a smaller range of 'Inclusive Skills' competitions, which are designed to provide an opportunity for those with special education needs to test their skills among peers and be celebrated like other competitors for their achievements; these particular Skills Competitions were not covered in this research.

To understand the context of the Skills Competitions, it is important to note that there is a cap on numbers for how many competitors can be registered from one organisation. This means that organisations are encouraged to find their 'shining stars' and strongest performers – those most likely to do well in the Skills Competitions, or even medal. This subjective selection is an important component of our findings and recommendations (see focus area 1 for more detail). Nevertheless, organisations are encouraged to use the early stages of the Skills Competitions to promote ambition and development for all students and apprentices, by involving everyone in pre-competition activity. In this way, and through the example set by students and apprentices who compete, WorldSkills UK aims to promote the importance and value of technical skills around a wide spread of the UK.

More information on the WorldSkills UK operating model can be found in Appendix 6.

Research aims and methodology

WorldSkills UK commissioned The Social Innovation Partnership (TSIP) to undertake this research in December 2018, and it continued through June 2019. The aims of this work were twofold. First, to provide a critical and insightful picture of diversity within the WorldSkills UK competitions, based on 2018 registration data of all competitors who were initially signed up. Second, to drive positive change across WorldSkills UK activities, and engage stakeholders from business, education and government.

TSIP's work was guided by seven overarching research questions:

1. How diverse are WorldSkills UK Competitions across skills, regions and colleges?

2. How do WorldSkills UK rules (including language, content, positioning, timing, etc.), and processes (e.g. judging, training, selection of Squad, etc.) influence demographic representation across competitions post registration?

3. How do FE colleges' cultures (e.g. bias, perception, social influence, external commitment to inclusion) and processes (e.g. registration, internal promotion and events, etc.) influence diversity in registration?

4. How do Competition Organising Partners (COPs) (e.g. provision of Judges, organisation of regional competitions, skill promotion) influence diversity pre- and post-registration?

5. How have various programmes, competitions, or organisations addressed diversity challenges across their work, and what lessons or solutions can be taken away and applied to WorldSkills UK?

6. What causes different demographic groups to experience barriers to engagement in technical fields, FE colleges and similar competition-based programmes?

7. How might WorldSkills UK start to address some of the barriers to inclusion gathered from this research in all three phases of influence – 1) the post-national activity, rules and regulations, and other elements fully under its control; 2) the activity led by COPs, Training Managers and colleges, under WorldSkills UK influence but out of its direct control; and 3) the sector-wide activity, influenced broadly by WorldSkills UK but out of its direct control?

To answer these research questions, our methodology and approach to this research was five-fold, including:

1. **Quantitative data analysis** – most of this data was already collected as part of WorldSkills UK's own registration process. It included demographic information (gender, ethnicity and disability) of all 3,021 registrants. It also included postcodes and college information, which we cross-referenced with external sources of data, such as the Index for Multiple Deprivation and any publicly available data on the demographics of the colleges involved in the process.

2. **Literature reviews** – to understand the sector, as well as barriers and enablers to diversity and inclusion across similar fields, TSIP explored good practice and WorldSkills UK's own processes. This research includes five types of reviews:

    I. **Review of WorldSkills UK documents** – examining the customer journey, the rules and regulations around each step of the programme, as well as the language and materials WorldSkills UK uses to promote the competitions programme.

    II. **Literature review of participation of different groups in similar programmes** – exploring diversity and inclusion barriers and trends, including the ways in which other similar programmes or organisations have addressed said barriers.

    III. **Rapid review around bias** – exploring the role that bias plays at different levels of education (including FE), training, similar types of programmes and the ways in which others have addressed this.

    IV. **Rapid review around role models** – understanding the potential for diverse (same-gender, same-ethnicity, etc.) role models in addressing some of the key barriers to diversity and inclusion, and their impact on cohorts and individuals.

    V. **Rapid review around the term 'competitions'** – exploring the implications of the term 'competitions' and how it affects diversity in similar programmes, especially around gender.

3. **Surveys** – TSIP conducted a series of surveys to collect information from a large pool of registrants and college staff, including:

I. **Surveyed 316 registrants** –this survey was an opportunity to reach a wider group of students who might not otherwise be involved in the focus groups, and who provided key insights around referral pathways, motivations to participate, perceptions of competitions and any barriers to participation that participants chose to disclose.

II. **Surveyed 14 Training Managers –** these helped us understand the demographics of Training Managers, and how they relate to the diverse representation of the cohorts which move from nationals to internationals. This also enabled us to understand the importance they weigh on diversity and inclusion.

III. **Surveyed 50 Judges –** these enabled us to understand the demographics of the Judges across different skill areas, and how that relates to the registrant cohorts' diversity as they move through the Skills Competitions. We also sought to understand at a high level how they judge, especially on the subjective sections of the criteria, and how that might permit perception and biases on different demographics to permeate.

IV. **Surveyed 6 Performance Coaches –** these helped us understand the role of Performance Coaches and the importance they weigh on diversity and inclusion, their willingness and ability to appreciate barriers as faced by certain demographics and how that influences, if at all, the support they provide to participants.

V. **Surveyed 28 college Principals, and 173 trainers and tutors** – these surveys were slightly different due to the nature of the roles of each group of participants, but at each level enabled us to understand the referral process from the perspective of the colleges, how they visibly embed practices enhancing diversity and inclusion across their organisations (or fail to do so), and their views on barriers to engagement and potential solutions.

4. **Interviews** – We conducted five sets of semi-structured interviews, enabling us to explore some of the challenges and opportunities around access and diversity in the competitions programme:

I. **10 Semi-structured interviews with Judges –** these interviews enabled us to further understand the subjective categories of judgment as part of any Skills Competition, as well as develop an understanding of any biases or perceptions held by different individuals, and their appreciation of the barriers faced by the competitors that they Judge.

II. **14 Semi-structured interviews with COPs –** these interviews focused on developing an understanding of the value placed on diversity by the COPs at an organisational level We used these interviews to understand their Judge selection process and how diversity features within this.

III. **8 Semi-structured interviews with Skills Champions –** these interviews focused on the experience of Skills Champions primarily from five key demographic groups identified by WorldSkills UK, and specifically focused on understanding any barriers linked to diversity (looking at role models, bias, the judging and decision-making processes).

IV. **Semi-structured interviews with 7 college Principals, 3 apprentice trainers and tutors and 2 employers –** these interviews built on the insights from the surveys, as well as from initial responses from the focus groups. They helped TSIP dig a bit deeper into the referral and decision-making processes, the value of diversity and inclusion, and explore potential solutions from the perspective of colleges and employers.

5. Focus groups – TSIP conducted 4 focus groups around the UK and followed up with one to one conversations with competitors – speaking to a total of 21 competitors throughout the UK.

Despite this large array of data and methods, there were some limitations to the data we had available. Interviews by their nature present subjective and qualitative findings, which provide depth of evidence but can also be conflicting. The quotes and perspectives that we include are designed to show any contrast of opinion, and to present these views as important perspectives rather than resounding facts across the whole of the WorldSkills UK Competitions. The number of people we were able to interview was also restricted by people's time constraints and availability. In terms of the *range* of available data, we were limited by a lack of registration data on sexual orientation, gender identity (beyond "Male" or "Female"), or trans or transgender; as such, we were unable to do a full analysis of the registration data for their prevalence. Although we included optional questions on gender identity and sexual orientation in our own survey, from which we were able to identify and then speak with those who are LGB, these numbers were limited and unfortunately did not include anyone identifying as trans or transgender.

Despite these limitations, we successfully surveyed a good sample to draw insights around barriers and solutions. The summary of the key numbers of people we collected data from are presented below in Table 1.

Table 1 **Breakdown of 697 stakeholders consulted over the course of the research**

Stakeholder group	Surveyed	% response rate	Interviewed	% response rate
Competitors	316	11%	21	N/A
Skills Champions	N/A	N/A	8	15%
Teachers / trainers	173	19%	3	43%
Principals	28	18%	7	50%
Employers	45	15%	2	18%
Competition Organising Partners	N/A	N/A	14	93%
Judges	50	100%	10	50%
Training Managers	14	32%	N/A	N/A
Performance Coaches	6	38%	N/A	N/A

What we mean by diversity and inclusion

This report is concerned with the extent to which people with different characteristics are treated, valued, and supported to participate and achieve within the context of the Skills Competitions. It considers diversity in terms of the extent to which participants and partners are representative of the wider populations from which they are drawn, and inclusion in terms of the extent to which diverse individuals are recognised, made to feel welcome and appreciated.
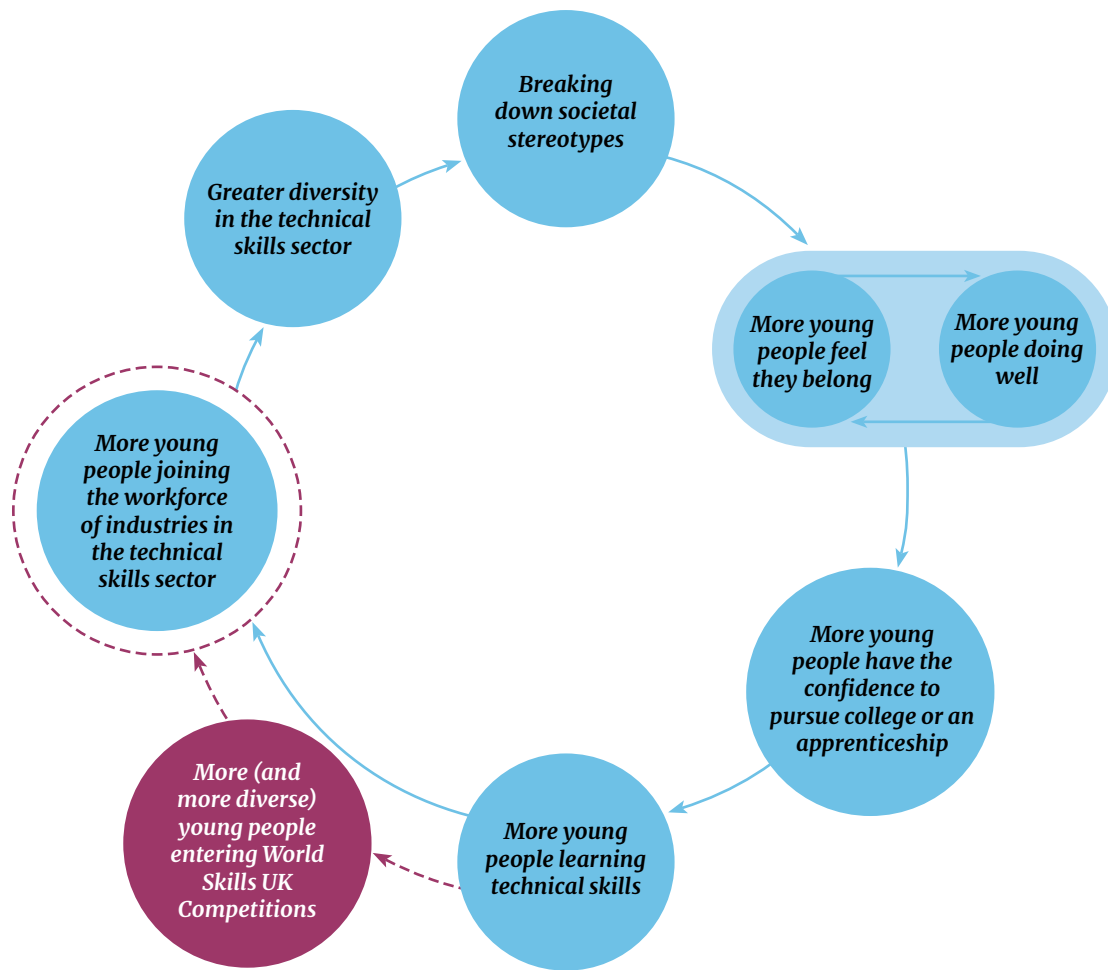
Diversity and inclusion are often talked about with reference to demographic features and especially those that are protected from discrimination under UK law: age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation[16]. In practice, these concepts are more nuanced and deal with a much wider range of differences than these alone, as well as the overlap and intersections between them.

Given the information available about Skills Competition competitors, this report discusses diversity and inclusion primarily through the lenses of gender, ethnicity, LGBT+, multiple deprivation levels, and national region. In trying to assess whether participants are representative, it draws comparisons with the UK population as a whole; the populations of UK FE colleges and apprentices; and, within the competitions, between those taking part in different strands, with a particular focus on participation that is counter-stereotypical to the sector. A common myth around Diversity and Inclusion is that its practices are about excluding White men; however, inclusive practices are instead about making sure that everyone feels welcome and safe in their environment, and free from discrimination and exclusion.[17] As such, the areas of diversity we selected were chosen as being those most under-represented in societal stereotypes, and within the Skills Competitions themselves, in order to pursue the research questions around experiences of people not feeling included. This has, however, included White males for example in discussions around multiple deprivation, and the limited data on sexual orientation; and straight White males were interviewed for their perspectives alongside others.

We are aware that the patterns we see within the Skills Competitions cycle to some extent reflect and are caused by broader trends – especially within the colleges, training providers and employers from which competitors are drawn. There is an opportunity to influence the participant pipeline, with knock-on benefits for the competition and beyond, into the world of work. By increasing diversity within the Skills Competitions, WorldSkills UK can contribute to a virtuous circle linking increased diversity with reduced stereotypes and increased participation in the technical skills sector (see Figure 2).

Figure 2   Conceptual diagram demonstrating the self-supporting cycle of societal stereotypes, the positive actions that drive change, and the role of the WorldSkills UK Competitions within the cycle of change

The importance of diversity and inclusion

This report begins from the premise that promoting diversity and inclusion is the right thing to do. It also proposes a link between diversity and inclusion and WorldSkills UK's vision of a flourishing and internationally competitive UK workforce.

Over the last few years, there has been a lot of talk and work around future-proofing the labour force, and particularly the skills sector, in the United Kingdom.[18,19] At the same time, organisations are recognising the value of heterogeneity of individual contributions, and this has led some to (noticeably) increase the diversity of their workforce and the inclusivity of their workspaces.[20]

As the demand for a more diverse workforce increases, more evidence is emerging showing the true business case for inclusive practice: that greater diversity increases the likelihood of increased innovation, revenue, and productivity.[21] In fact, the *Diversity Matters* report produced by McKinsey and Company has shown that companies in the top quartile for racial/ethnic diversity are **35% more likely to have financial returns above their national industry mean** (see Figure 3).[22] While it is important to note that causality is not established within these reports – whether diversity leads to business growth, or good business practises lead to greater employment and diversity – any relationship is

Figure 3 — Likelihood of financial performance above national industry standard median, by diversity quartile (%)
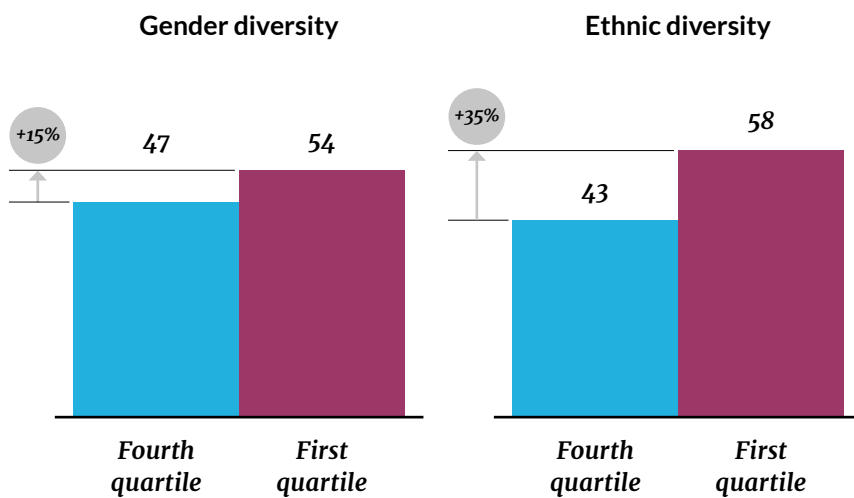
Gender diversity

+15%

Fourth quartile	First quartile
47	54

Ethnic diversity

+35%

Fourth quartile	First quartile
43	58

Image from Hunt, Layton and Prince (2015)

Figure 4 — Probability of having an above-average performance for those in the top and bottom quartiles of ethnic diversity in their executive team

+20%

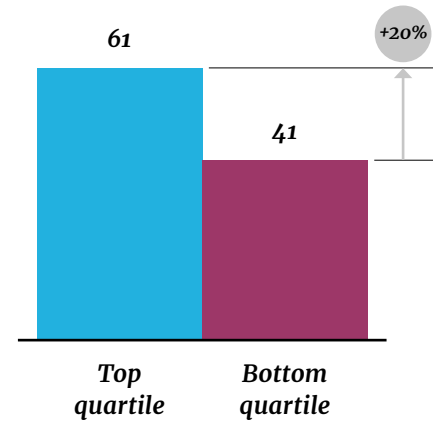| Top quartile	Bottom quartile
61	41

Image from Hunt, Layton and Prince (2015)
Source: McKinsey Diversity Database

compelling. Both the idea that diversity improves business function, and that good business leadership and strategy also incorporates diversity, support the idea that businesses who wish to be more successful, and aligned with other successful businesses, should consider their diversity strategies.

Similarly, within the executive leadership of US companies, those in the highest quartile for ethnically diverse leadership were **20% more likely to have above-average financial performance** than those in the lowest quartile: for every **10% increase in ethnic diversity, there was an 0.8% increase in earnings before interest and tax**.

The report proposes several reasons for why such a relationship exists. One notable reason provided is that more diverse companies are 'winning the war for talent', because by striving to recruit more diverse individuals, they tap into talent pools that others are missing. When this is considered in the context of a skills sector that is struggling to secure talented workers for the future, opening the door and creating a welcoming environment for diverse individuals may be the solution.[23]
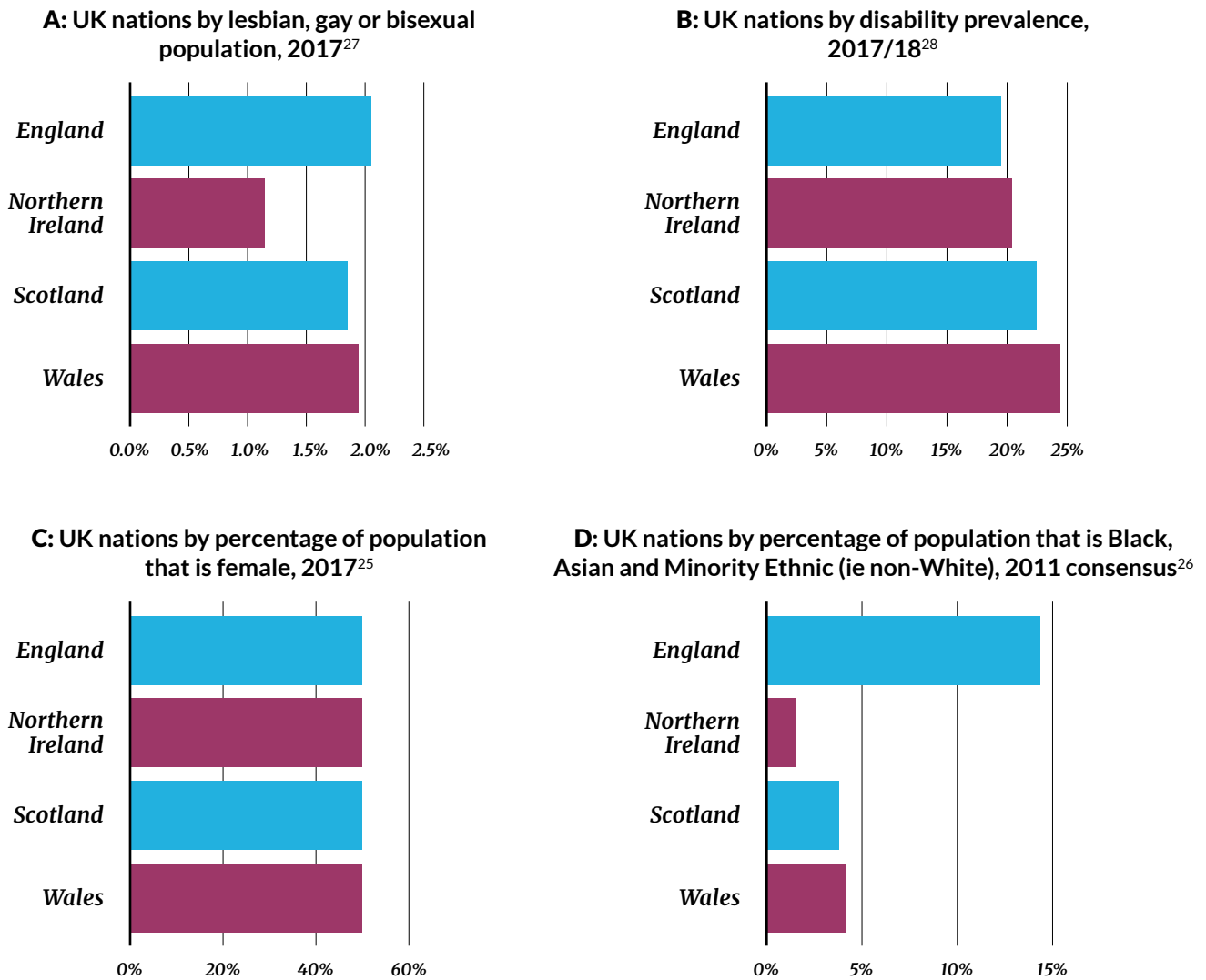
Beyond recruitment appeal, these reports have demonstrated that diverse teams also provide better quality and outcomes: not only by the sum of their individual talent, but through the benefits of interacting and ideas generation.

The variety of perspectives and ideas provided by diverse individuals fosters innovation and creativity, leading to **better decision-making and better business performance**.

"Everything goes back to embracing difference. Embracing difference in a way that lifts our game culturally and from a performance point of view. I see productivity lift in my business unit when we embrace difference …. And since we've been on this inclusive culture drive, we've seen performance step up year after year." **– Industry employer**

Championing difference for a better workforce

Figure 5

Graphs showing the breakdown of demographics across the UK nations by LGB (A), disability (B), female (C) and BAME (D) prevalence

A: UK nations by lesbian, gay or bisexual population, 2017[27]

B: UK nations by disability prevalence, 2017/18[28]

C: UK nations by percentage of population that is female, 2017[25]

D: UK nations by percentage of population that is Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (ie non-White), 2011 consensus[26]

The state of diversity across the nations

The United Kingdom is home to over 66 million people characterised by different ages, ethnicities, genders, sexualities, abilities, religions and socio-economic backgrounds.[24]

The tables below highlight some of the diversity that exists across the UK, in terms of the overall population (see Figure 5), before highlighting countries with high levels of diversity for specific characteristics.[25]

For example, 1 in 7 people living in England come from an ethnic minority background;[26] 2% of people living in Wales identify as lesbian, gay or bisexual (data on trans and transgender populations are not provided);[27] and among working-age adults specifically, around 18% of the UK identifies as having a disability.[28] The potential for the UK workforce to boast its diversity is undeniable.

Table 2   **Comparison between national UK demographics and the demographics of the construction and hairdressing workforce in 2018, as examples**

Demographic	UK working age population	UK construction workforce	UK hairderessing workforce[29]
LGB[ii]	2%	2%	Not available
Female	51%	14.1%	89.3%
With disability	18%	4.8%	Not available
BAME	19.5%	5%	6.7%

Yet, despite the diversity of the population, industries have had limited success ensuring these differences are included in their workforce. In A Blueprint for Change, a report by the Construction Industry Council,[30] and the UK Industry Performance Report 2018, data showed a stark difference between the construction workforce and these national census data for the population overall; demographic gaps can also be seen, in one selected example, in the hairdressing workforce (see Table 2).

With such a wide range of people living in the UK, it is clear that the UK has the potential for a diverse workforce, however the following data shows that this is yet to be achieved. In the truth, the current lack of diversity speaks to the deeper institutional and systemic barriers faced by minority groups in particular.

In the technology industry, 1 in 9 senior leaders are from a BAME background, and 66% of boards and more than 40% of senior leadership teams have no female representation at all.[31] In manufacturing, individuals from BAME backgrounds represent just 6% of the workforce in the industry (but make up 25% of engineering graduates).[32] BAME graduates in engineering face significantly greater barriers to employment than their White British counterparts: although BAME graduates are 6% less likely to secure employment, the difference in engineering is 20% (71% of White British graduates have secured employment within six months of graduating, compared with 51% of BAME).[33]

Even when steps to increase diversity are taken, it is still common for companies to fail to create inclusive working environments. There are estimates for example that UK engineering could be losing more than £11.2 billion a year due to LGBT+ engineers feeling unable to be themselves at work.[34]

Finally, positions of power continue to be disproportionately held by those who have been privately educated, and this is a trend that does not appear to be changing. A report found that while just 7% of the British population attended a private school, privately educated individuals accounted for 39% of those holding positions of power (up from 36% five years prior).[35]

The history of Diversity and Inclusion efforts has not only been challenging for employers, but also for further education (FE) colleges, public organisations and social programmes. Although there are good intentions to address this challenge, there is a common perception that diversity and inclusion is a problem that is almost 'too big' to tackle.

ii   Data not available on trans or transgender prevalence.

> *"It's a bit like global warming; these issues are so big that some people think they are almost too big to worry about... Need to find a way to keep people engaged."* – *Advisory Group Member*

Nevertheless, there have been some commendable approaches to increasing diversity and fostering cultures of inclusion across whole organisations. From targets to facilitate women on boards,[36] to campaigns to bring women into academia like Higher Education's Athena Swan Charter,[37] to initiatives targeting leadership diversity in education (like the Black Leadership Initiative),[38] there is much room to build on good practice.

Diversity and inclusion in the technical skills and FE sector: the pipeline of competitors

Employment and apprenticeships in the technical skills sector

In the case of technical skills, BAME young people are less present in construction, IT and engineering: they make up 25% of apprenticeship applicants, but only 10% of actual apprentices.[39] Underrepresentation is even more prominent for people from Asian backgrounds specifically, who make up only 4.3% of apprentices compared to 8% of the population.[40]
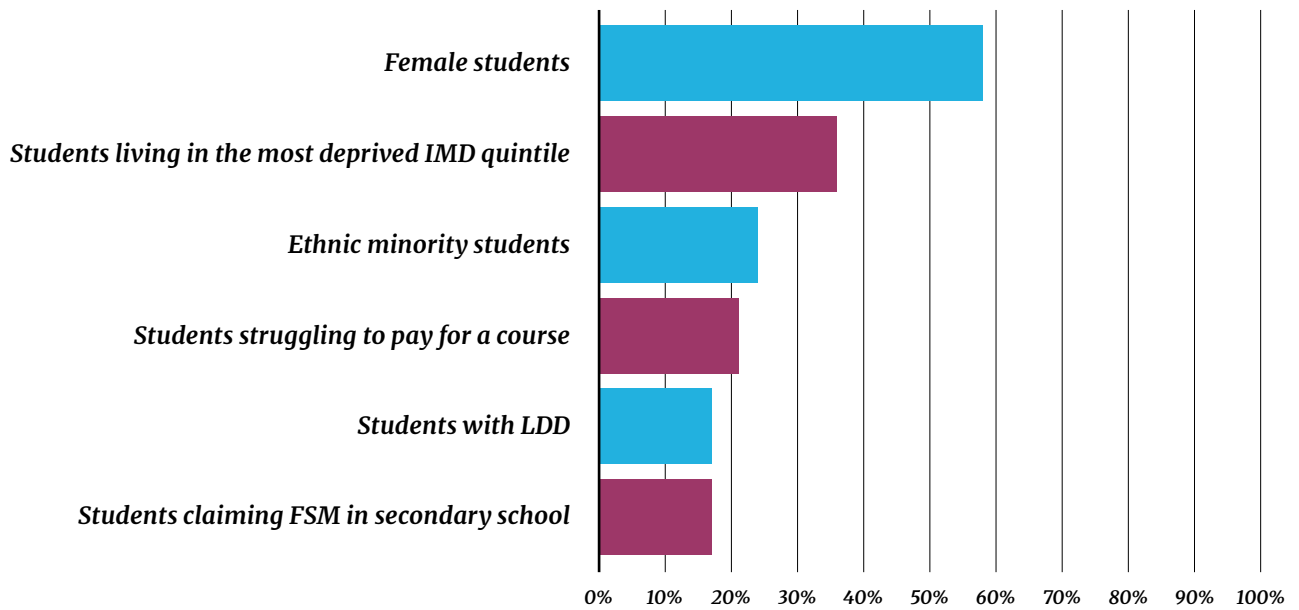
> *"There is clearly a diversity issue in apprenticeships and the depressing inequality in Skills Competitions is staggering. We're hitting approximately 11% BAME representation in apprenticeships now, but BAME representation is about 25% at school–level."*
>
> *– Advisory Group Member*

Furthermore, in 2016/17, only 13% of young people starting degree-level apprenticeships were from the most financially disadvantaged backgrounds.[41] Such a figure is particularly surprising when compared to estimates that as many as 30% of young people living in the UK are living in poverty.[42] On the other hand, only 51% of apprenticeship starts in England were by men in 2017/18. This was in fact the first time more apprenticeships have been started by men than women since 2009/10. Additionally, 11% of apprentices identified themselves as having a disability or learning difficulty (a proportion that has been steadily increasing since 2011/12).[43]

Although apprenticeship programmes show some level of diversity, there is a clear underrepresentation of several minority groups. This is likely to be due to the barriers to entry that are faced by individuals from minority groups looking to enter the technical skills sectors.

Figure 6 Demographics of FE college students across different minority or disadvantaged groups, generated from data sourced previously cited

The Further Education (FE) sector

There are 269 colleges in England, educating a total of 712,000 16-18-year-olds in 2017-2018 across their various programmes, and an additional 77,500 being educated through apprenticeships.[44] Of this total, ethnic minority students (i.e. those not identifying as White British) make up 24%, 17% have a learning disability or difficulty and 17% claimed free school meals at age 15. Overall, 36% of FE learners live in an area in the most deprived Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) quintile, and 21% who paid for their course stated that it was difficult for them to meet the cost.[45] Females comprise 58% of all FE learners, but only 7.8% are apprentices in Engineering and Manufacturing Technologies.[46] According to a recent analysis report, only 7% of Principals in the UK are BAME – and three out of the nine regions in England have no BAME Principals whatsoever. [47]

Figure 6 shows that WorldSkills UK has access to a diverse group of FE college students, and in some instances, students who are more diverse than the population of the UK (proportionately).

Barriers to entry in the technical skills sector

The barriers that exist in the technical skills sector can be traced back to a mix of social and cultural considerations, such as stereotyping, poor access to careers education, a lack of role models and a lack of social and cultural capital. The statistics in the sections above suggest that barriers to entry are more prominent for minorities in the case of apprenticeship programmes than FE colleges; but efforts to increase diversity and inclusion can never be overemphasised, as highlighted by one FE college Principal:

"FE feels like a place that genuinely wants to address this more than other sectors. We work with a lot of ... people who are unrepresented, come from deprived areas or who do less well in education. Colleges are very diverse – and working with students from all socioeconomic backgrounds. The FE sector has a good chance to have good debates, but the issues are not well understood and not funded, so it is very limited in terms of what it can achieve."

The problem of gender stereotyping can be a barrier for both women in STEM and the LGBT+ community. For women in STEM, there is a lack of positive reinforcement at a young age.[48] Later in life, this can result in a lack of female peers, mentors and role models in STEM and therefore further perpetuate the cycle of women not entering STEM careers.[49] For the LGBT+ community, 'insensitive curriculum content' in STEM serves as one of the biggest barriers to learning.[50] (One example of how the STEM curriculum could become more inclusive would be greater recognition for the existence of gender and sexual diversity within nature as a whole.)[51] In addition, Stonewall's 2017 School Report found more than half of LGBT+ young people who were bullied in school reported that it had a negative effect on their plans to go to university or college.[52]

Although barriers to entry exist, apprenticeship programmes and FE colleges do educate a diverse group of people, and therefore provide WorldSkills UK with access to diverse individuals. As a result, WorldSkills UK has the opportunity to create Skills Competitions that are attended by competitors of all backgrounds.

Diversity and inclusion in the WorldSkills UK Competitions

Somewhere along the pipeline diverse competitors are being phased out. In 2018, 90% of competitors were White, 67% were male and only 5% identified themselves as having a disability or learning difficulty;[iii] compared to the diversity of the competitor pipeline; it is indisputable that there is significant room for improvement.

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iii The scope of this research does not include data or analysis relating to the Inclusive Skills Competitions.

Figure 7

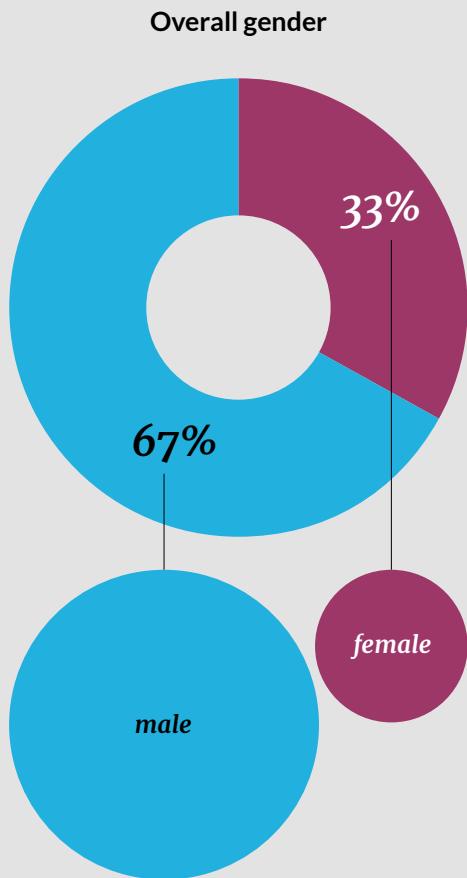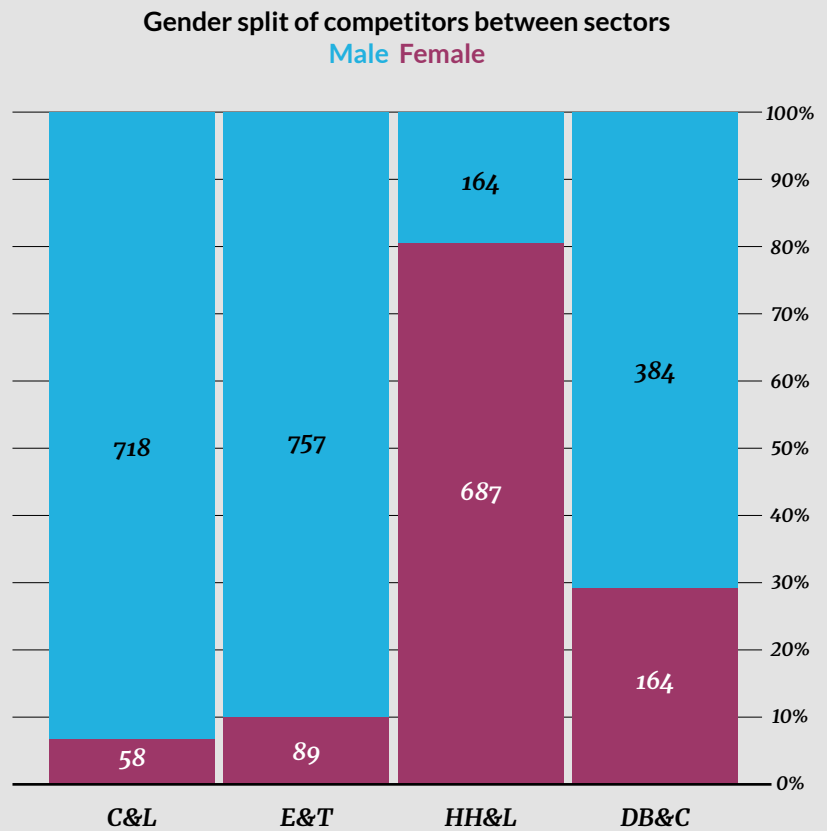### Gender percentages of all 2018 competitors

Overall gender

33%

67%

male

female

Figure 8

Gender percentages of all 2018 competitors, across the four skill sectors

Gender split of competitors between sectors
Male Female

	C&L	E&T	HH&L	DB&C
Male	718	757	164	384
Female	58	89	687	164

Breakout 1: Demographic breakdown of the WorldSkills UK 2018 competitors

Throughout this report, there will be a focus on analysing the data collected from WorldSkills UK and its stakeholders from the perspective of five specific groups, including:

- Women in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM)

- Black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) competitors

- Competitors with special educational needs (SEN)

- Competitors who are members of the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender plus (LGBT+) community (not represented below, as this information was not collected by WorldSkills UK in 2018)

- Competitors from disadvantaged backgrounds (as per Index of Multiple Deprivation [IMD] measures)

There is a strong gender imbalance in the competitions

67% of all competitors were male, despite 51% of the population being female. This breakdown was not evenly spread across the Skills Competitions, which showed a great deal of gender segregation: only 9 out of the 56 Skills Competitions had between 30-70% males; on the other hand, 35 Skills Competitions were more than 90% male, or less than 10% male.

Overall ethnicity

90%
White British / Irish / Other

3% *Asian or Asian British*

1% *Black / African / Caribbean / Black British British*

2% *Mixed*

4% *Not stated / Other*

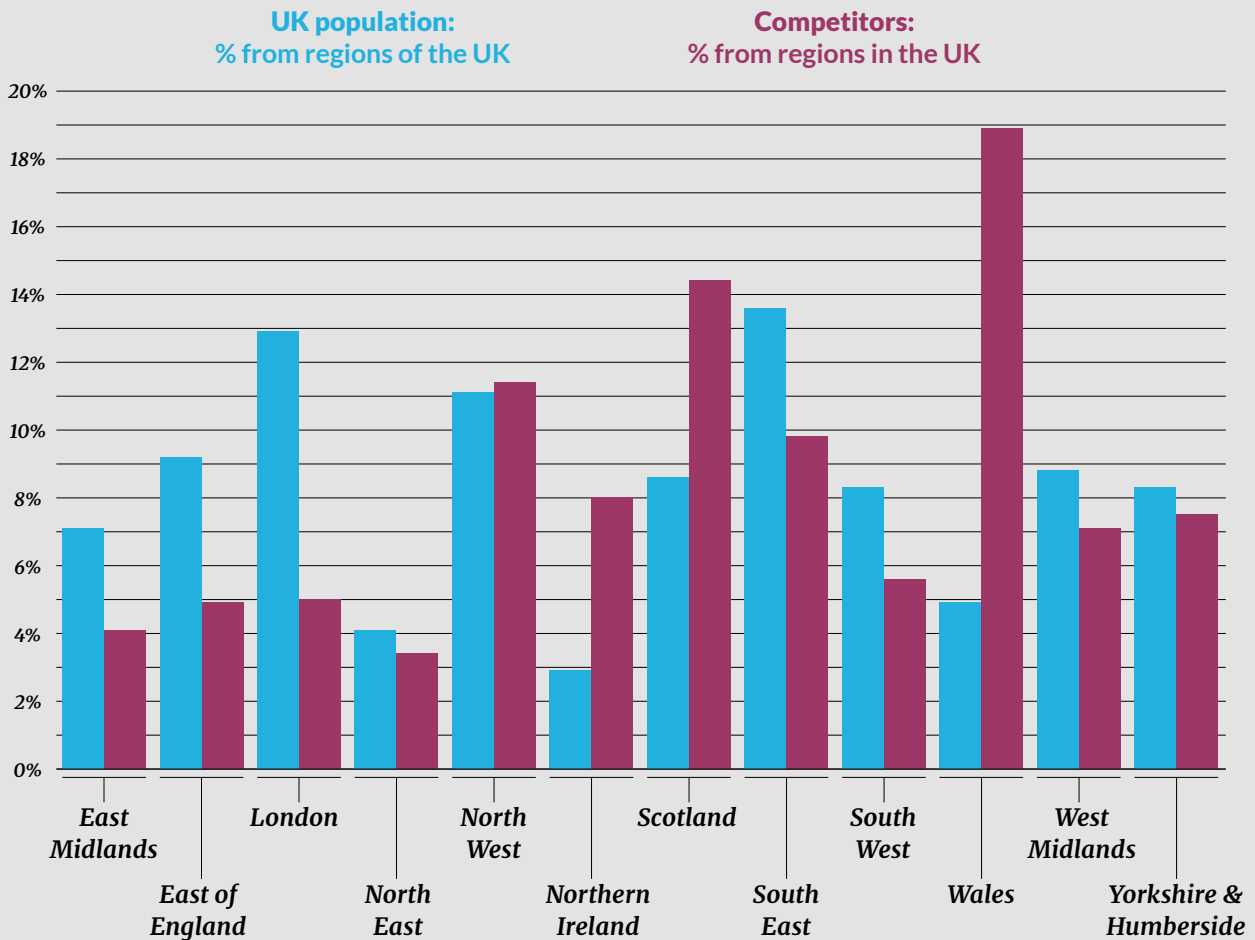**Ethnicity split of competitors between sectors**
BAME White

The gender split within different Skills Competitions reflected gender stereotypes for different skill sectors. WorldSkills UK groups its Skills Competitions into four main sectors: Construction and Infrastructure (C&L, e.g., bricklaying, joinery); Engineering and Technology (E&T, e.g., industrial electronics, robotics); Digital, Business and Creative (DB&C, e.g., graphic design, customer service); and Health, Hospitality and Lifestyle (HH&L. e.g., beauty therapy, culinary arts). The first two are stereotypically male industries; the heavy focus on beauty skills in the latter is stereotypically female. These patterns are reflected in competitor intake.

BAME representation is limited

Competitors are also more White than is representative of the UK: although only 76% of people in education are White, they made up 90% of 2018 competitors (see Figure 9). There is not a large difference between skill sectors in this area, except that the Digital, Business and Creative Skills Competitions are considerably more ethnically diverse than the others, and at 79% White, they are the closest to being representative of the UK (see Figure 10).

Figure 11 Distribution of 2018 competitors and the whole UK population across regions

UK population:
% from regions of the UK

Competitors:
% from regions in the UK

Competitors were, however, representative by socioeconomic background: the multiple deprivation indices (IMD) for all competitors were evenly spread across the ten deciles; this participation across people from all socioeconomic backgrounds is an important demonstration that opportunities for social mobility through the Skills Competitions are widely available. Competitors' breakdown by region also showed a spread across many parts of the UK, but weighted heavily towards England, which made up 59% of competitors overall (see Figure 11).

Low representation from SEN competitors

Another particularly stark difference is noticeable in relation to competitors with disabilities, mental health conditions, or special educational needs (SEN): only 5% of competitors were registered within any of these categories, of which 2% have SEN; this is considerably lower than the national statistics for SEN in colleges, which is 17%.[iv] Although this may seem surprising, it is crucial to note that WorldSkills UK have dedicated Inclusive Skills Competitions for young people with learning difficulties and disabilities, with their own competitor numbers which for the most part make up the difference. Broadly, the Inclusive Skills Competitions fall outside the scope of this research, though some interviewee perspectives on the relative merits and inclusivity of separate competition categories are mentioned briefly later.

iv Competitors may be less likely to be accurately registered for the Skills Competitions as having SEN, compared with the national statistics – the possibility of under-reporting of SEN or other conditions in the registration is discussed later in the report, as a suggestion raised by stakeholders.

Championing difference for a better workforce

An opportunity to increase diversity and inclusion across the Skills Competitions

The findings confirm that WorldSkills UK competitors are not fully representative of young people in the UK: they are overly weighted toward White British men without disability or special educational need (SEN).

While undertaking this research, it became clear that key barriers to diversity and inclusion were apparent at each stage of the competition process. Therefore, as WorldSkills UK is representative of the wider system, and because it has such a strong industry network, it holds a significant platform through which it can help change both its own activity and the activities of the wider sector.

Now that data have been provided to support the claim that there is a lack of diversity in the Skills Competitions – highlighting that it is a problem that must be addressed – the next step is to explore how WorldSkills UK and its stakeholders can effectively increase diversity and inclusion across the Skills Competitions. This is done in the report through five focus areas examining different segments of data; presenting insights on the challenges; and outlining recommendations for WorldSkills UK and its partners to address.

Five focus areas for increased inclusion, diversity and representation across the WorldSkills UK ecosystem

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"The burden for change is not just on WorldSkills UK but the industry as a whole."

– Advisory group member

With knowledge comes responsibility: reinforced by the indisputable data in this report, WorldSkills UK has the opportunity to act to increase representation across its Skills Competitions programme and play a pivotal influencing role beyond its immediate sphere. Below is a plan with five focus areas to facilitate this transformation.
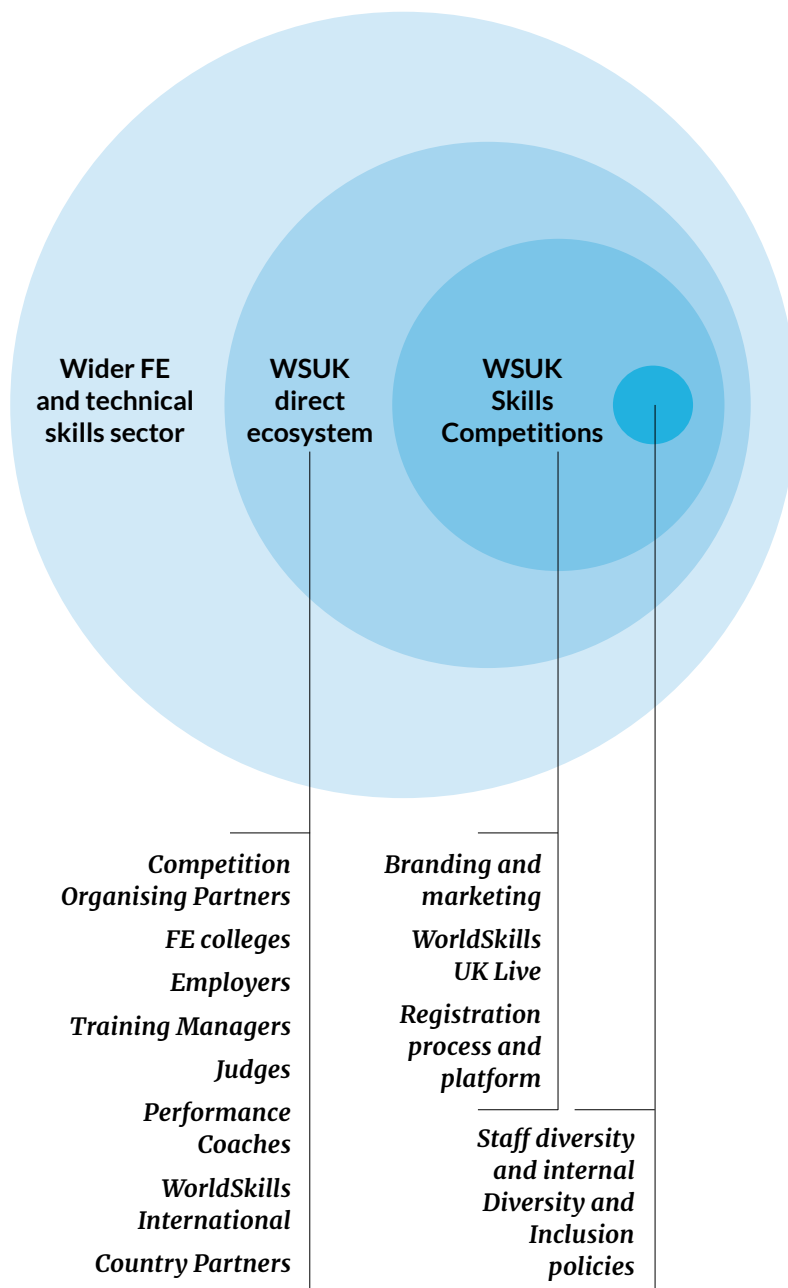
Backed by seven-months' worth of data and insight from 697 individuals – competitors, Skills Champions, employers, colleges, Competition Organising Partners and more[v], what follows are five focus areas which present data, and then draw out key themes in barriers; interpretive insights; and recommendations for WorldSkills UK. It explores where WorldSkills UK might directly act, as well as where partnership is paramount to increasing diversity and fostering a culture of inclusion in the Skills Competitions, and ultimately the technical skills and further education sectors more widely. This direct action and engagement or partnership working is broken down by where the responsibility and sphere of influence lies for different aspects of diversity of inclusion: WorldSkills UK themselves; their direct ecosystem; and the wider FE and technical skills sector (see Figure 12).

The insight follows five focus areas which address the key barriers identified through the research and outline key recommendations. It encourages WorldSkills UK to:

1. Reaching and appealing to diverse individuals

2. Tackling stereotypes and preconceptions

3. Improving competitor support and reducing barriers to entry

4. Increasing and appreciating diversity within WorldSkills UK, the Skills Competitions, and among partners

5. Forming a clear vision and narrative around diversity and inclusion across WorldSkills UK and partners

These points can be achieved by acting on key recommendations which have emerged from the insights. Within each of the focus areas, relevant recommendations are broken down to provide guidance around how to achieve them.

Figure 12 **Conceptual diagram of the three spheres of influence relating to WorldSkills UK, and action for diversity and inclusion**

Wider FE and technical skills sector

WSUK direct ecosystem

WSUK Skills Competitions

Competition Organising Partners

FE colleges

Employers

Training Managers

Judges

Performance Coaches

WorldSkills International

Country Partners

Branding and marketing

WorldSkills UK Live

Registration process and platform

Staff diversity and internal Diversity and Inclusion policies

v   See Acknowledgements for the full list of participating stakeholders and Appendix 2 for the full research plan

1

Focus Area 1: Reaching and appealing to diverse individuals

This focus area is about spreading awareness of the Skills Competitions to a wider and more diverse range of individuals. It is in response to the following identified barriers, which can hinder or prevent diverse participation:

- The decision whether or not someone participates in the Skills Competitions is almost always in the hands of the tutors or employers, rather than the competitors themselves: only 17% of 2018 competitors self-registered

- There is limited awareness of the Skills Competitions amongst potential competitors: 98% of 2018 competitors had first heard about them from their tutor or employer

Whilst it is likely that most tutors and employers are supportive of diversity, it is uncertain how many diverse or counter-stereotypical people may have been discouraged or 'less encouraged' to compete. Diversity might be low partly because of these barriers at the registration level.

"The lecturer chose a few students to compete. He picked me and one other person"

Therefore, we recommend that WorldSkills UK:

Form new strategic partnerships with groups that can help achieve diversity and inclusion goals

By developing partnerships with government, business, and others who can financially sustain or endow the Skills Competitions and its competitors, WorldSkills UK can both emphasise and disseminate the business case for diversity and inclusion in the Skills Competition, and increase awareness of the Skills Competitions amongst students, young people, and apprentices.

Develop a shared vision and set targets for what diversity and inclusion in the Skills Competitions ought to look like

A common, shared vision for diversity and inclusion, alongside agreements with partners to set positive action and diversity targets can have widespread influence across the sector and the Skills Competitions.

Target diverse areas of the UK

WorldSkills UK can improve its Skills Competitions by working with areas which are more diverse and can have more inclusive cultures, both to ensure that this influences the wider network and the competitor experience.

"I'd never heard about it before, and not much since – [where] I go to, it's not really heard of"

Widening the reach of people and organisations who know about WorldSkills UK is imperative to improving its pipeline of competitors – specifically, how a focus on directly promoting to students and apprentices might address a key barrier related to a reliance on others (e.g. tutors) to identify them for participation. It will also help to reiterate the importance of diversity and inclusion both in the Skills Competitions and more broadly.

This can increase diversity in two ways: by directly marketing the Skills Competitions to students and apprentices, their interest and enthusiasm (and therefore self-identification to be supported to compete) might address challenges around information not being disseminated fairly; and by strategically increasing marketing to diverse regions of the UK, and specifically to education and employment providers, a more diverse pool of potential competitors may be reached. Intrinsic to both of these is a positive action approach, and a compelling case made to potential competitors for why they should take up these marketed opportunities to participate.

1.1 Barriers: the registration process

To participate in WorldSkills UK Competitions, individuals must have the support of their college tutor or employer. Notably, 87% of competitors were registered by someone else – generally their tutor or trainer. This 'sponsorship' is integral to competitors' success, as it influences the time and resources they have to fully engage in the competition programme.

Since very few students or apprentices hear about the Skills Competitions directly, it is almost always up to the employer or tutor to register them (or present the option to them), rather than the student approaching their tutor or trainer to pitch the idea and ask for support. Around 60% of tutors and employers surveyed have experienced restraints or difficulties in registering students due to there being a capacity on how many students they are permitted to put forward for some Skills Competitions. As a result, they must make decisions (which can be subjective) about who should be selected to register. To select students, 55% of tutors and employers reported using the existing performance of students to make their decisions, while another 33% said that they ran mini competitions to select the top candidates.

Registration experiences generally fell into one of two categories: 1) the tutor advertised the Skills Competitions to the entire class, and students self-selected to compete; 2) the tutor advertised the Skills Competitions to the entire class, and specific individuals were then approached by tutors and encouraged to compete. Interestingly, all the women in STEM we interviewed were individually approached by their tutors.
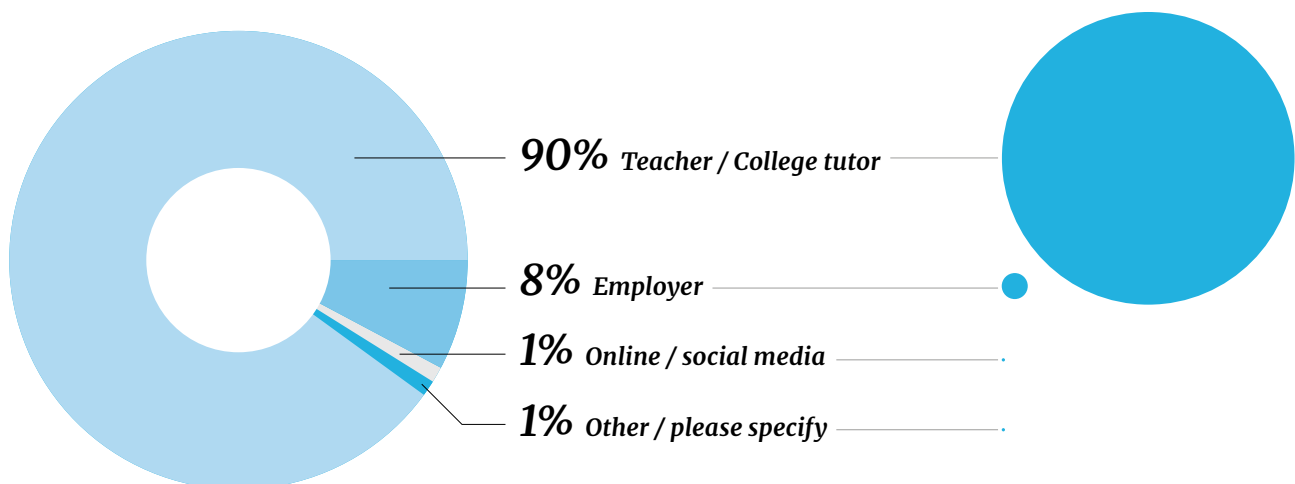
"The lecturer chose a few students to compete. He picked me and one other person."

Some tutors even went as far as registering their students before they had decided to compete.

"I found out I had been put into it. My name was put down by one of my tutors."

"The lecturer asked the whole class if anyone would be interested. I wasn't actually in college at the time. The lecturer put me down even though I wasn't there, then double-checked with me when I returned."

Figure 13   **Breakdown percentages of how 2018 competitors first heard about the Skills Competitions**

90% *Teacher / College tutor*

8% *Employer*

1% *Online / social media*

1% *Other / please specify*

Championing difference for a better workforce

Without question, this approach helps teachers make best use of their experience and judgement in order to make decisions based on a rounded picture of their motivations and capabilities. At its best, it means that teachers have the flexibility to encourage and register students whose true potential they know to be greater than their classroom performance or grades are currently showing. On the other hand, it also leaves room for bias, as teachers and trainers are positioned as influencers who must make decisions (and assumptions) about ability, suitability, and interest, based on personality and performance in a formal academic or workplace setting. It also means that those who are not actively selected by their teachers or trainers, but still want to participate, may have to advocate for themselves, and often only the most confident will manage to do so.

It is necessary to note that encouraging confidence and self-promotion can also be a problematic approach to engaging minority young people,[53] and that the recommendation is not that potential competitors be encouraged to circumvent their college or employer. Ultimately, not feeling confident or empowered enough to access advice and opportunities, even if they are available and provided by the institution, affects the experiences of less advantaged students across the board. Addressing bias among those in positions of influence, on the other hand, as well as working to build confidence among minority young people, both begin with strengthening cultures of inclusion within the institutions to which they belong. Strategies for fostering cultures of inclusion are explored in detail in Focus Area 4.

1.2 Barriers: awareness of the Skills Competitions

The clear majority of competitors did not hear about WorldSkills UK Competitions directly: 98% first heard about them via their college tutor, or employer; only 0.6% heard of them through online media; and none reported finding out about them from posters or flyers (see Figure 13).

During this discussion, some Skills Champions pointed out how surprised they were that they had not heard about such a large competition programme. Other competitors in a focus group said that they *had seen marketing materials for the Skills Competitions, but only after they were already underway. Those from Northern Ireland and Scotland, in particular, felt that their nation would benefit from more awareness and advertising of WorldSkills UK*, although it is worth noting that there are groups in both nations who are actively working to promote the Skills Competitions.

"Northern Ireland doesn't know about WorldSkills UK other than hairdressing or construction and infrastructure ... I want that to widen out to digital skills, butchery, and so on."

"Get colleges and universities to put it out there more – the word isn't being spread as well as it could be."

"I'd never heard about it before, and not much since – at the university I go to, it's not really heard of."

"Up in Scotland, I don't think it's really that big, I didn't see anything on the internet or anything like that."

By ensuring students and apprentices are marketed to directly at the beginning of the competition cycle, WorldSkills UK can more effectively influence who registers to compete.

1.3 Insights: developing a convincing case for students and apprentices to participate

Based on the research to date, it has become clear that a more convincing case needs to be made to students and apprentices about why they should get involved in Skills Competitions in the first place. Ultimately, they need to understand the benefits of involvement – particularly how Skills Competitions might help them progress in their career, and how this might outweigh possible constraints on their time and resources.

"The training young people get in WorldSkills UK really helps them get where they want to go in the industry. They show that young people can widen their horizons in this way."

"The message from WorldSkills UK isn't as clear as it needs to be; there are mixed messages coming from it at the moment. It's important to communicate about what competitions can do for someone's potential career. It's important to take a person on the journey and support them – it's not all about competition."

Past competitors acknowledged that competing in the Skills Competitions would positively impact their employability, with many stating that they would include the experience on their CVs. Competitor interviews have also indicated that for many students, the opportunity to 'try something new' was a key motivator for wanting to take part in the Skills Competitions.

"I hadn't done anything like that before. It seemed like a nice challenge. It seemed like something different to do."

Other interviews highlighted that some competitors chose to compete due to their belief in their skills, and/or their interest in the competition activities.

"I wanted to show people how good I am."

"I had competed in a hackathon and enjoyed that so I thought the Skills Competitions would be similar."

Ultimately, for those who choose to compete, it is clear they understand the value of simply competing. For those who choose not to compete, however, it may be that the positive impact competing can have on both their personal and professional development has not been properly communicated to them. This insight should inform how WorldSkills UK markets its Skills Competitions to students going forward.

Championing difference for a better workforce

Figure 14

Conceptual diagram highlighting the barriers that organisations, and the learners within them, can face producing a filtering effect of who ultimately competes in the Skills Competitions
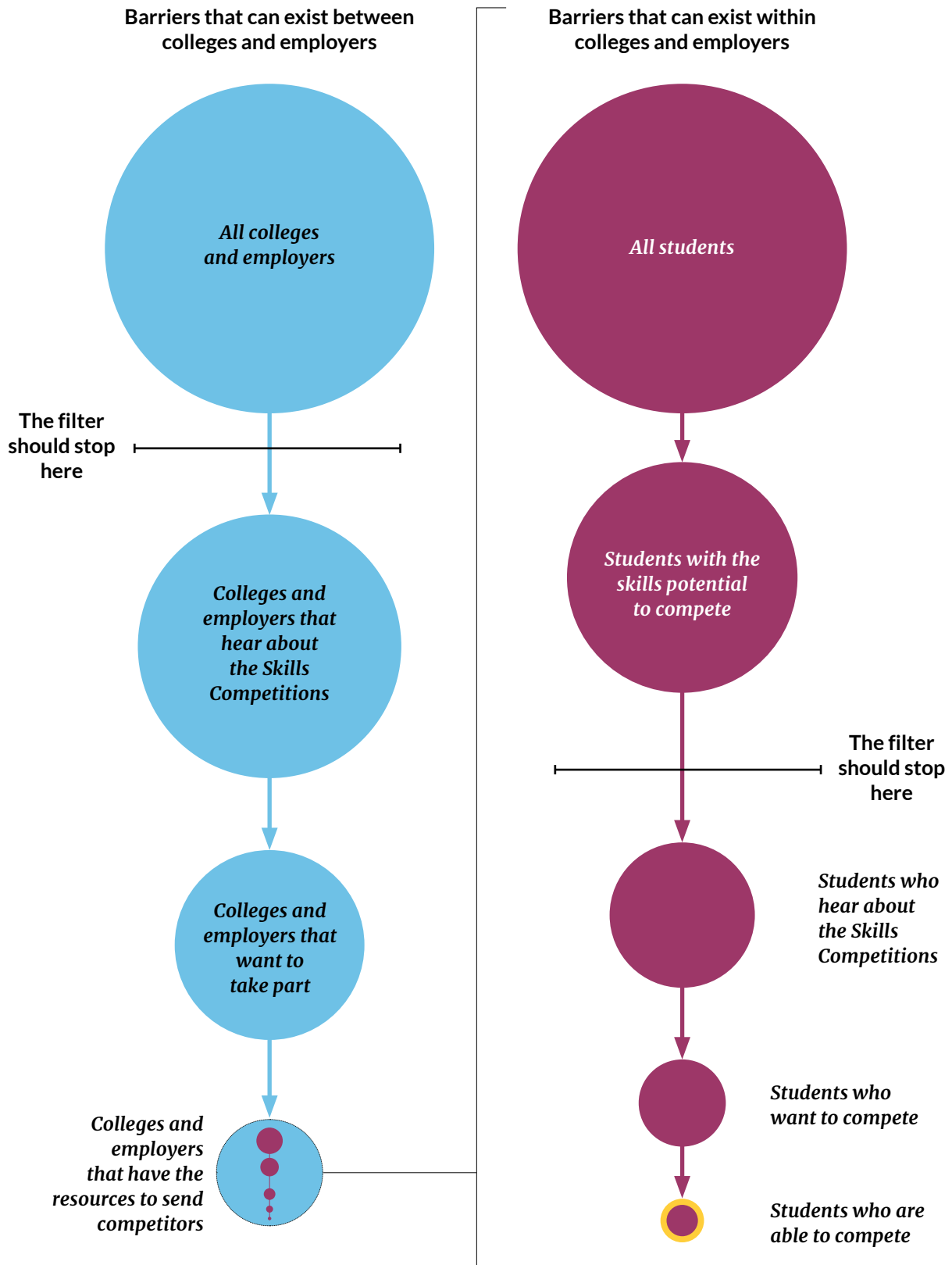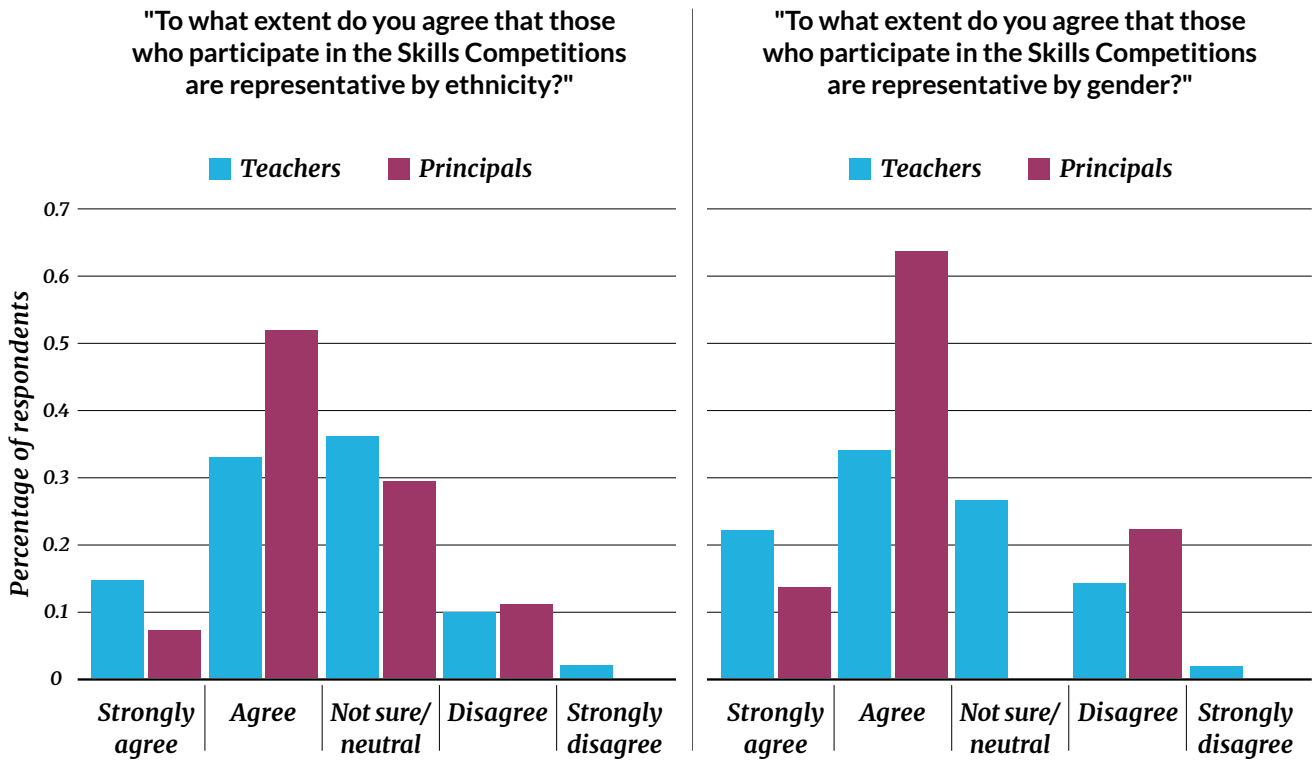

Barriers that can exist between colleges and employers

Barriers that can exist within colleges and employers

All colleges and employers

All students

The filter should stop here

Colleges and employers that hear about the Skills Competitions

Students with the skills potential to compete

The filter should stop here

Colleges and employers that want to take part

Students who hear about the Skills Competitions

Colleges and employers that have the resources to send competitors

Students who want to compete

Students who are able to compete

Figure 15 **Survey responses showing the extent to which teachers and Principals agree that the competitors they register are representative of their college: by their ethnicity (left) and by their gender (right).**

"To what extent do you agree that those who participate in the Skills Competitions are representative by ethnicity?"

"To what extent do you agree that those who participate in the Skills Competitions are representative by gender?"

1.4 Insights: increasing diversity through focussed reach

Working to directly engage more college and employer partners in cities across the country is something that is very much within the realm of direct influence for WorldSkills UK. A lack of awareness of WorldSkills UK is one of the first barriers that colleges and employers can encounter, preventing them from taking part in the Skills Competitions (see Figure 14).

Within colleges

Competitors seem to be coming predominantly from less diverse colleges, compared with others across these cities in the UK. From surveys and interviews, both teachers and Principals did not necessarily feel that the students they sent to the Skills

Competitions lacked diversity **for their college** – i.e. most felt that competitors were representative of the student body that they have.

This was particularly the case for Principals, where 74% agreed or strongly agreed that their competitors were ethnically representative, and 78% that their competitors were representative by gender; tutors were less sure (37% indicated they didn't know), with 55% agreeing or strongly agreeing that their competitors were ethnically representative and 56% that they were representative by gender: it's likely that Principals are more familiar with the demographics of their overall student body, and therefore more sure one way or the other.

Although these perceptions of representation are sometimes incorrect, they reflect a larger challenge around the current reach of the WorldSkills UK competitions, especially in areas and regions of the UK which are more diverse – as noted previously in Figure 11, London in particular is currently under-represented in the Skills Competitions.

> *"It's a no brainer to me that city colleges are missing out, and that they're the ones with diversity." – Principal*

COPs tend to partner with companies and colleges across the UK to host the competitions: 75% of COPs queried stated that they engage partners from across all four nations. Unfortunately, this does not change the fact that few COPs (those who are not colleges themselves, for example) have any control over competitor selection or recruitment, as this is the responsibility of partner organisations like colleges and employers. The result is that most competitors come from the same colleges each year, and most of these institutions are not located in big cities with diverse populations. Multiple COPs made the correlation between competitor diversity and geography.

> *"Some of our competitions run by Middlesex University have people with diverse backgrounds because they are in London. Some competitions are 100% White"*

> *"It tends to be the same colleges and providers that are entering, and they're in predominantly White areas."*

> *"If you look at where [diverse] competitors come from, they are coming from colleges in London, where there is diversity. And we don't get many entries from towns where there is a mixed ethnic makeup in a community. Communities are in East Anglia or on the south coast which are all White. The breakdown doesn't surprise me. We've had Asians and Black competitors, but they are in the minority."*

A number of COPs noted that more employers and colleges in London and other big cities must be actively engaged to send competitors on a wider scale. When asked what WorldSkills UK could be doing differently in this area, six COPs suggested bespoke engagement with particular stakeholders. Ideas for improved reach ranged from increasing employer understanding about the Skills Competitions, to gathering employer information upon competitor registration, to delivering road shows and events in target areas, to hosting qualifiers and even LIVE in more convenient areas for students (so they do not have to travel too far), to engaging young people before they enter college, and finally, to directly contacting organisations that had never engaged before.

> *"Road show targeting ethnic minority areas – London, Birmingham, Manchester, showing people what they could do. That would be a way to get people on board."*

> *"Doing pre-competition activities, events, masterclasses at colleges in the areas where they're not getting entries, as well as educating staff and employers at least a year in advance."*

GOOD PRACTICE

Targeting 'cold spots'

North Warwickshire and South Leicestershire College holds some of their heats at colleges located in 'cold spots' – areas in which the COP identifies that a particular minority group is not entered often, for whatever reason. When NWSLC make contacts in these low-enrolment areas, they follow them up to ensure they can continue engaging with the young people there and encourage these contacts to enrol other students.

Within employers and training providers

As it stands, WorldSkills UK is open to competitors from employer and/ or apprentice backgrounds: to enter the Skills Competitions, someone only needs to be enrolled in education or an apprenticeship in their relevant skill, or to have been employed in their skill for three years or less. Nevertheless, in practice it is mostly college students who compete.

For WorldSkills UK itself, there is also a crucial opportunity to widen the diversity of its competitors by forging links and syncing trainee pipelines with a wider range of employers and training providers. By reaching out to employers and training providers with targeted awareness campaigns, WorldSkills UK can represent the best of the UK's talent, and in doing so, lead and spread the message of diversity to a wider range of audiences and influencers. Currently however, there is still relatively little engagement of apprentices despite contact with employers (in particular), which also means that too few of their perspectives are gathered in order to better understand their motivations and experiences with the Skills Competitions.

Breakout 2: Reach and characteristics of 2018 competitors from employers

In 2018, 78% of all competitors were registered by FE colleges (see Table 3). Only 9.6% come from employers, despite the fact that they are one of the most successful, proportionately, at winning medals – something highlighted by a member of the WorldSkills UK Diversity and Inclusion Advisory Group:

"If the large majority of registrants are coming from FE colleges, but the highest concentration is medallists and Skills Champions is coming from employers, there is clearly already a disconnect."

In terms of how this relates to diversity, employers who did send competitors were not entirely representative of the UK population; competitors were under-represented in particular from London and East of England. Already, then, it is clear that the existing reach and relationships with employers is geographically skewed and has room for far more engagement with organisations from more diverse areas, and with strong inclusive practices.

Table 3   **Breakdown of all 2018 competitors and the organisation type they were registered by, as well as the proportion of those students who went on to win medals.**

Organisation type	Total competitors	Total medallists	% who medal
Employer	290	51	18%
FE College	2371	155	7%
Higher Education	67	10	15%
Individual	1	0	0%
School	2	0	0%
Sixth Form College	34	1	3%
Specialist College	55	7	13%
Training Provider	191	11	6%
University Technical College	10	2	20%
Grand Total	3021	237	

Figure 16

Percentage of 2018 competitors from employers and total UK population who come from the UK regions

UK population: % from regions of the UK

Competitors from employers: % from regions in the UK

East Midlands · East of England · London · North East · North West · Northern Ireland · Scotland · South East · South West · Wales · West Midlands · Yorkshire & Humberside

Championing difference for a better workforce

As displayed in Breakout 2 on preceding pages, the Skills Competitions are particularly lacking employee competitors from London, and from the Digital, Business and Creative sectors. London as a region, and DB&C as a skill sector, are both high in diversity (as evidenced in previous points). Having relatively few employer competitors from these regions is likely affecting the lack of ethnic and gender diversity across the employer competitor pool. This relates, then, to the perspectives of some that employers could provide a good (and currently missed) opportunity to increase the diversity of the Skills Competitions through their competitor entries.

"If we looked at the sector as a whole, potentially the hardest to reach individuals are sitting in employers' premises rather than sitting in a college."

"There is a higher percentage of males that go into hairdressing via apprenticeships/salons whereas girls go via college. Within the hairdressing sector, the training for salon-based assessors are done via training providers but they don't know about WorldSkills UK."

1.5 Insights: a positive action approach

...greater awareness and potential interest in taking part can result in more and more diverse groups of people taking part.

How might WorldSkills UK go about targeting students from different underrepresented groups in an attempt to specifically encourage them to compete? Positive discrimination in the UK is unlawful under the Equality Act of 2010, but this refers to a very specific model of decision-making whereby someone from a less advantaged background is selected for something solely based on their background, as opposed to their skill or capability.[54] This is very different to **positive action**, which suggests selecting someone from a less advantaged background where the skill sets are the same. Positive action could also take the form of contextual recruitment, where candidates' academic and other achievements are assessed in the context of their social background.[55]

In the case of WorldSkills UK, this means pushing for a more proactive marketing approach to spreading awareness and an ethos of inclusivity at the beginning of the competition cycle. The key identified risk is when a small number of teachers, trainers or employers are selectively disseminating information about of the Skills Competitions; direct marketing mitigates the risk at this key stage. Although competitors are ultimately registered and supported by their college, employer, or training provider, greater awareness and potential interest in taking part can result in more and more diverse groups of people taking part.

One COP already implements a proactive strategy for filling the diversity gaps in competitor entry:

"We'll review this year's recruitment, see who gets through to regionals and then go back to work with partners to identify where there's been a dropout. As a competition, we're making strides each year and need to maintain that."

This can also be facilitated through diligent outreach – for instance, engaging with LGBT+ and other relevant student groups across colleges to ensure their members are made aware of the Skills Competitions, as well as directly marketing and promoting to those who are under-represented to bypass potential discrimination in who is made aware.

GOOD PRACTICE

The Hepp South Yorkshire Plus programme

At HEPPSY+, Higher Education providers in the region work with Year 9 - Year 13 students from designated wards in South Yorkshire, North East Derbyshire and North Nottinghamshire where participation in Higher Education is lower than would be expected based on GCSE results. The project is funded by HEFCE and works to support the government's goals to double the proportion of young people from disadvantaged backgrounds in Higher Education (HE) by 2020; increase by 20% the number of students in HE from ethnic minority groups; and address the under-representation of young men from disadvantaged backgrounds in HE.

Championing difference for a better workforce

Recommendations to reach and appeal to more diverse individuals

Form new strategic partnerships with groups that can help achieve diversity and inclusion goals

Examples include:

- Forge partnerships with government, businesses, and others to financially sustain or endow this import work so that money is not a barrier for young people nor WorldSkills UK and partners to realise ambitions; financial support might come directly from WorldSkills UK or a sponsorship system or similar.

- Create advisory "working groups" of FE colleges, training providers, and employers to develop the business case, apprenticeship pipeline and diversity and inclusion benchmarks from education and industry perspectives

Develop a shared vision and set targets for what diversity and inclusion in the competitions ought to look like

Examples include:

- Encourage COPs to create targets for the recruitment of minority Judges over the next 2-3 competition cycles

- Include diversity and inclusion objectives in the KPIs for Competition Organising Partners, regarding their promotion to competitors

- Develop more formalised agreements with colleges and Independent Training Providers (ITP) including specific diversity and inclusion targets

Target diverse areas of the UK

Examples include:

- Research and map the colleges, Independent Training Providers (ITP), and employers in the larger cities that WorldSkills wishes to engage (e.g. 'cold spots'), and contact them personally to make a case for why they should get involved in WorldSkills UK Competitions

- Visit secondary schools as part of the WorldSkills UK roadshow to increase perceptions of technical skills, or work with local young ambassadors' networks to do so

2

Focus Area 2: Tackling stereotypes and preconceptions

This focus area addresses wider societal barriers which emerge as a result of entrenched stereotypes and preconceptions about skills and abilities, and who has them; and the value placed upon technical skills and apprenticeships. Biases identified in these areas provide the following barriers:

- Stereotypical representations of people in technical skills can limit the perceived options and social mobility of diverse or counter-stereotypical people who do not see themselves reflected in the sector

- Negative or under-valued portrayals of technical skills as a whole limits how many young people enter into apprenticeships or vocational trades: in 2012 only 6% of 16-18 year olds were in apprenticeships, and between 2017-19 numbers of new starts have dropped by 23%.

- These portrayals of technical skills have been described as 'second class' and particularly impacting on some BAME groups: 36% of COPs surveyed believe that the reason some skill areas are more diverse than others is due to societal stereotypes around certain trades

Many stakeholders indicated a willingness and enthusiasm for increasing diversity and inclusion among their students and employees, but struggle in practice to increase their numbers. Strategic stakeholders suggest that organisations work too much in silo when it comes to diversity and inclusion, and that greater impact could be had by all if there were better communication, awareness spreading, and networking and synchrony of best practice.

We therefore recommend that WorldSkills UK:

Launch a shared Commission for diversity and inclusion in the sector

WorldSkills UK has the opportunity to harness its partnerships to focus activity around diversity and inclusion in the technical skills sectors, including by involving young people in systems change across the FE sector.

Involve competitors more actively across the WorldSkills UK ecosystem

Competitors are the primary stakeholder of Skills Competition and could significantly influence inclusive processes through increased involvement: e.g. a diverse youth advisory board, or increased roles in the roadshows.

"It's frustrating that apprenticeships and vocational work is seen as second class"

"Guys become bricklayers, girls become hairdressers – particularly parents, and some schools, have these perceptions even though this isn't how it should be now."

The perception of technical skills is a significant barrier – not just for WorldSkills UK but for the wider FE and technical skills sector. Within those sectors, there are also significant preconceptions about 'who' can work in these spaces: e.g. men in construction, women in beauty, etc. These barriers are reinforced by a lack of role models for individuals who don't fit within these norms. Yet, as is evident from a remarkable body of reviewed literature (see Part 1), there is a strong correlation between inclusion and business success.

In many ways, the key to practising inclusion to increase diverse participation is to improve representation across the board, alongside transforming cultures internally to better include diverse individuals, and renewing efforts to change non-inclusive narratives within the sector. It is important not to underestimate the effect that role models and examples of counter-stereotypical trailblazers can have on young people.

2.1 Barriers: the importance of representation and role modelling

It is well-known that young people internalise the racial and gendered structuring of society via their perception of the social positions of adults, and therefore the presence or absence of adults who look like them helps them visualise the various possibilities for their futures.[56] Role models also symbolise particular aspects of various roles, including wealth, intelligence, social standing and the necessity of striving to achieve one's goals. Students must be able to envision what the outcome of their pathway might look like, and for young women and minority young people, it is therefore important that they can look to others for an illustration of this journey.

Research shows that members of minority groups benefit from the success of another member of their social group.[57] Ultimately, matched role models provide examples to young people of the social resources available to them, and ways in which to overcome the similar barriers which their adult and peer counterparts have faced in the wider social and cultural context.

Students must be able to envision what the outcome of their pathway might look like

CASE STUDY

The effect of women in STEM role models on female students[58]

A French study conducted in 2015-16 found that the one-off classroom intervention of a female role model in STEM mitigated the negative stereotypes associated with science jobs held by secondary school students (both male and female), as well as gender stereotypes around cognitive ability. In the longer term, the intervention had a significant impact on the educational choices of girls, particularly increasing the choice of STEM careers in those who were already high achieving in maths. Overall, the study showed that after one hour of intervention by female role models, the Grade 12 girls were 30% more likely to enrol in a STEM track higher education programme the following year. Subsequently, the representation of girls in STEM tracks the following year rose from 30% to 34%. Interestingly, female role models working in the private sector had more success at inspiring Grade 12 girls to enter STEM undergraduate programs after secondary school, compared with their researcher counterparts.

The importance of role models, and the impact of seeing oneself represented, has been demonstrated in our research in two main ways: from those who have experienced it, and found it a powerful motivator; and those who did not, and strongly felt a lack of role models. 'Representation' is a fluid and personal concept: one person might consider someone with a different gender but who grew up in the same neighbourhood a role model, but this might not be the case for another person; others may see plenty of people from the same gender and ethnicity, but look to role models who have a similar learning difficulty. This research attempts to treat 'representation' and 'role models' as anything meaningful to a given person's interpretation, without assuming that they always have to fill a particular identity category; though in some cases it is necessary to posit that, for example people in skill trades with disabilities can be role models to others with disabilities, and therefore that a lack of these kinds of role models is a gap. As such, the importance of understanding what is welcoming and encouraging for different groups of students is clear – as are the different approaches to addressing this.

"I'm an ex-apprentice from Liverpool. I came from quite a deprived council estate. I was relatively bright at school but had zero interest in academic studies (apart from music and sport). It was only when an industry person came to my school and started teaching me that I started to get hooked. This was the first time I ever felt really excited about something... This teacher was a real role model for me and made industry feel real, like a credible option for me. I was good at engineering and design and I knew it was a career I could get into."

Narratives help us make sense of society

2.2 Insights: transforming narratives

Narratives help us make sense of society, and often can become such common-place assumptions that they massively influence how we perceive certain sectors, certain topics, or certain terms. WorldSkills UK can use its platform to influence the sector by helping challenge certain narratives about the technical skills sector and diversity and inclusion, as well as redefining its own narratives around inclusive competitions. By proactively choosing language and telling stories that can help communicate certain messages and opportunities, WorldSkills UK has the potential to help raise the profile of technical skills, make competitions more inclusive and heighten awareness and action around diversity and inclusion.

The UK has a long way to go before technical skills are valued equally to university and more academic pathways.

2.3 Barriers: how technical skills are represented in the wider sector

"It's frustrating that apprenticeships and vocational work is seen as second class. This reputation alone contributes to engagement/under–engagement and perspectives of minorities – whether we're talking about poor white kids or those with protected characteristics. Doing anything to change this perception is a good thing."

As education reporter Janet Murray states, "we could learn something from Switzerland, where vocational isn't a dirty word."[59] The UK has a long way to go before technical skills are valued equally to university and more academic pathways. Some have argued that there is 'snobbery' around vocational skills, which is often driven by parents and sometimes school teachers, but reinforced by peers.

"I think an issue in applying for apprenticeships at the moment is the schools, because anyone that's half capable will be advised to do A-Levels – no one we've had has been advised at school that an apprenticeship is a good career path. We see through all trades that we're struggling to find students." **– Tutor**

This is especially true in the context of making the sector more inclusive, as a lot of this perception stems from cultural perceptions and occupational stereotypes. Some competitors in London, for example, highlighted the fact that their Asian culture "relies heavily on accolades and status," which they stated is not traditionally associated with the technical skills sector.

As demonstrated above, many of these cultural perceptions draw on occupational stereotypes, which play a significant role in determining which career paths students pursue, especially when it comes to gender breakdowns.

Championing difference for a better workforce

As a result, 36% of COPs queried believe that the reason certain skill areas are more diverse than others is a result of long-held stereotypes that permeate British culture and schooling. These perspectives were echoed by Principals, tutors, and apprentice trainers, 85% of which spoke about the difficulties they face in encouraging non-stereotypical participation in different skill areas. 23% mentioned having difficulty attracting BAME students to their skill sectors, but the majority (85%) mentioned gender differences, particularly around recruiting women to STEM skills or men to beauty or social care. One of the Judges interviewed specifically identified that:

"Guys become bricklayers, girls become hairdressers – particularly parents, and some schools, have these perceptions even though this isn't how it should be now."

2.4 Insights: communicating the worth of technical skills

Tackling these stereotypes is a monumental task, and not something WorldSkills UK can address directly through Skill Competitions; however, it can play a role by using the prestige of the Skills Competitions (both on the local and international stage), WorldSkills UK LIVE events and the Skills Champions schools programme to improve public perception of the sector. For instance, WorldSkills UK LIVE encourages parents to further explore technical education and careers options for their children, and can continue to be used as a positive way to promote interest in the sector:

Helping young people to find out how to become an apprentice is…low on the radar for parents with only 1 in 20 (6%) saying it was a reason for attending, although after attending almost half (49%) intend to encourage young people to consider apprenticeships in the next 6 months, and this is higher among those accompanying 14 to 15 year olds (54%) and 17 to 18 year olds (59%).[60]

More practically, and in the short term, WorldSkills UK should also consider partnering with local organisations who are already active in this space – echoing the recommendations in Point 1. WorldSkills UK could also use its platform to highlight career pathways acquired through the different skills, including their value and importance in the economy.

A proven way to approach occupational stereotypes is through early intervention.[61] In the context of WorldSkills UK, this would include increasing the value placed on apprenticeships and FE from an earlier age – for example at schools.

"So, it's important to work on building a positive profile for apprenticeships and breaking down existing stigma.

Apprenticeships should be enriching, brilliant career opportunities in their own right. We've found that some schools don't want to talk to us about apprenticeships. Indeed, many schools are measured or assessed on how many students get into university, and this is directly opposed to other measures. Ultimately, it goes back to how we educate our teachers and pupils."

"Think about what they can do for younger students – introduce them to engineering when they're younger, not just after they're 16. We've done activities in primary schools where gender interest is easily 50:50, but once they're 11-14, you get that shift where girls go for more traditional academic paths."

Changing this narrative can also have the dual effect of increasing the engagement of different employers and colleges, whose focus is to raise the profile of the work. WorldSkills UK therefore has an opportunity to use its platform more proactively; but this first requires ensuring that branding and marketing is aligned across all different types of stakeholders.

"The other side of our work is to raise awareness of technical education and raise the general profile of technical education. Academic education is still largely considered to be of higher value than technical education, so there is work to be done to showcase the benefits, productivity and enormous career opportunities that can be accessed through technical education." – **Advisory group member**

GOOD PRACTICE

Learning from Canada: targeted early intervention schemes

Targeted intervention schemes – including conferences, workshops, summer camps and mentoring – starting at an early age are an integral part of tackling unequal representation in technical programmes.

In Canada, Skills Ontario hosts the largest young women's conference in the country, with over 2,000 young women attending annually from across the province.[62] In an effort to battle stereotypes about skilled trades being male-only industries, the organisation also provides mentoring opportunities for those who attend their Career Exploration Events and Young Women's Conferences, so that young women can more easily picture themselves moving into technical fields. To complement their one-off events, Skills Ontario also runs week-long summer camps in 26 different locations across the province for young people aged 12-14. Nearly 400 young people attended in 2018. The camps include workshops focusing on different skills, industry tours and mentoring.[63]

Recommendations to tackle stereotypes and change narratives

Launch a shared Commission for Diversity and Inclusion in the sector

Examples include:

- Select a set group of partners to develop a shared vision for what diversity and inclusion in skills should look like, including young people (e.g. through a roundtable or working groups)

Involve competitors more actively across the WorldSkills UK ecosystem

Examples include:

- Create a diverse youth advisory board to support Skills Competitions going forward

- Showcase minority Skills Champions role models in roadshows and include them in visits with relevant minority student groups

- Hire previous Skills Champions or other alumni to serve as key city or regional programme managers or ambassadors to support diversity and inclusion activities and wider Skills Competition strategy

3

Focus Area 3: Improving competitor support and reducing barriers to entry

WorldSkills UK has an opportunity to focus more proactively on the support available to competitors – establishing strong, consistent structures which equalise participation by addressing systemic barriers. These barriers (financial, social, emotional or otherwise) can prevent competitors from participating or from being successful:

- Because of the barriers they face, only 40% of tutors and employers stated that their most skilled students were always able to take part

- The majority of 2018 competitors strongly agreed that they felt supported by their tutors, teachers, employers and family, with 64% of judges think that support from tutors determines the success of competitors

- However, financial and family responsibilities were suggested to make competition difficult or impossible for many, with 23% of tutors and trainers suggesting this prevents them from registering students

Competitors for the most part felt strongly supported by the structures around them: whether from their colleges or employers, or WSUK and their competition partners. However, some had had to overcome significant barriers through these support systems, and employers and principals have flagged that many cannot become competitors at all.

As a result, WorldSkills UK should:

Establish consistency across all partners through standardising Skills Competition processes

Standardisation of certain processes can ensure both broad and specific commitment to inclusive ways of working, removing a risk of this inconsistency causing only increasing inclusion in certain partners, skills, or areas.

Adapt its communications and marketing strategy

A relatively quick win for WorldSkills UK centres around their marketing and comms strategy – including revisiting their brand as a Diversity and Inclusion Champion.

"I've got 3 kids so working 12 hour days at college was stressful ... if people didn't have [the] support system [I had], I don't know if they could compete"

Providing stronger support structures for competitors can help to address systemic challenges that they might face as a result of their background and ensure their success – be it barriers around the cost of participation, or personal motivations and support structures at home. Support can come from tutors, peers, family members or WorldSkills UK representatives, but whether competitors receive sufficient support to compete can shape their experience in the Skills Competitions – and even whether they choose to engage in the first place. The competitors we interviewed repeatedly alluded to the community spirit evident throughout the Skills Competitions as being one of the things that made the biggest difference to them feeling included, valued and capable of competing.

3.1 Barriers: possible barriers pre-entry

Some education stakeholders we spoke to had stories of specific times where their support and encouragement led to success for their quieter students; in one case, the tutor felt that the most intrinsically confident and assertive students are not the ones who ultimately do well in the Skills Competitions.

"The ones who get the best [scores] are the ones who aren't confident – confident boys think they're better than others, they're cockier. The boy who won last year was dyslexic, had a low SES upbringing, had never been on a plane before... he was the least outgoing of all of them. He had no self–confidence, wouldn't talk, but was very interested in learning – and he would pay attention. The ones who want it seem to do best."

However, beyond confidence and motivation, many tutors and trainers were aware of other practical barriers to competing that students might face; only 37% said that none of these barriers affected the young people they registered for the Skills Competitions. Breakout Box 3 highlights some of the barriers, perceived and real that competitors face to both participation in the Skills Competitions and their continued engagement with the programme.

Breakout 3: Support provided to competitors throughout the competitions

Support from tutors and employers

Across all surveyed competitors from 2018, 207 out of 302 respondents strongly agreed that they felt supported by their tutors or employers to enter the Skills Competitions; a further 63 agreed, and only 7 disagreed or strongly disagreed (these were White British, with no disabilities). This demonstrates compelling evidence for the support provided by tutors and employers, at least for those who do end up registering to compete.

This matches the perspectives of tutors and employers that it is extremely important to build confidence and self-belief in their students. These support systems are echoed by the Skills Champions interviewed. For many, the support of their tutors or employers was a valuable and memorable part of their journey and success.

"My tutor came down, and then she had to go home; so then the head of school came down to watch, and then two more members of staff – so the amount of moral support I had was just tremendous. When I got my gold medal there were only 3 members of staff, but when I went through to the back the officials thought there'd been 20 people because of all the noise they made."

"Working part-time, going to college, and also practicing was very very hard. But college was happy, and supported whatever I said I needed."

Notably however, one Skills Champion had managed to succeed despite not having had such support from his tutor; his example highlights the need to be aware that many may be being deterred from registering at all.

CASE STUDY

The existence of barriers for minority competitors

Paul (real name changed) is a BAME college student who competed in plastering at college level, then went on to regionals and nationals. After his tutor at the time refused to register him for competition after telling him he was not at an adequate level to compete, Paul contacted WorldSkills UK directly to register himself. The other students this tutor was putting forward to compete were White, non-disabled males. When he eventually got to regionals, the same tutor tried to enter him as a junior, stating the same thing: his level wasn't high enough. Paul ended up placing second at regionals, with a score higher than any of the other first-place winners who competed elsewhere that year. Unfortunately, his tutor left before he competed, leaving Paul unsupported during the competition. Paul had to advocate for himself in order to push beyond this gatekeeper and ultimately enter and succeed in the Skills Competitions.

While this support is undeniably crucial to competitors, it is worth noting that on some occasions, this support and encouragement is not in itself enough to alleviate stress; for instance, for the woman who was the first ever to compete nationally in her STEM Skills Competition:

"I did it to please her, she's a really good lecturer, and there are not many women! But then I found out there was all this hype that I was the first woman winning anything in that category – my lecturer said, 'Oh you have to go to nationals!' … I ended up going, I was the first woman going to the nationals – and I felt this huge pressure."

Support from family and peers

Unsurprisingly, support from family and peers also came up as an important factor for those competing – it did not come up as universally important, but generally when competitors felt like other support systems were not being encouraging enough, or in some cases when family help was needed to pitch in and help with other responsibilities.

For the Skills Champion who hadn't been supported or encouraged by his tutor, the support from his peers at the college "backing me 100%" was an important boost for his morale. For another Skills Champion with children, she needed to consult with and gain the support from her family and partner before competing, in order to get some cover with childcare.

"I spoke to my mum and my partner, because I was told I'd have to work more, but I told them that if I came through then we'd be better off for it. They said the same thing, it's not going to bother them, so why not just go for it? I've got 3 kids so working 12-hour days at college was stressful … if people don't have that support system, I don't know if they could compete."

It is important to bear in mind, however, that competitors are also influenced by which skills and work sectors their families would support them in, and that this can be determined by cultural expectations and stereotypes (both in White British and BAME families, though sometimes in different ways). For a female STEM Skills Champion, her father's attitudes towards women in male-dominated industries had been a barrier which she had to overcome:

"My dad's very men-do-this and women-do this ... before I went into tech I wanted to be in the police, but the look he gave me was complete disgust, he was like 'What? Women can't do that job' and I told him 'You can't tell me that, I'll do whatever I want to do' ... and at the end of the day, he also says it shouldn't stop me."

In this particular case, the Skills Champion attributed her competitive nature and determination with motivating her to compete anyway, and the representation of Northern Ireland (where she is from) for her dad's ultimate support.

"My dad was like 'show them we're from NI, show them what we can do in our small country – don't show them when you're scared."

On the other hand, this example highlights the similar difficulties that other students and apprentices may face: whether it is lack of parental support for girls in STEM; girls feeling like their friends would tease them for studying or training in STEM skills; or BAME families regarding some skill sectors as not being prestigious enough for their children to aim for. The latter example was raised by some Principals, tutors, and employers - particularly in the case of Asian British families.

"I do think that there are cultural expectations about what a good career is. We have an ex-student who is now a millionaire, made his money after doing graphic design. His mum and dad, I'm sure they're proud of him, but they said he needs a proper job like his brother (who's a teacher). In IT hardware, then you have Asian young men; but in digital creative, it's more White."

"Parental engagement for ethnic minorities may be a barrier [to Skills Competitions], if they want them to concentrate on doing well at college or going to university!"

Support from WorldSkills UK

WorldSkills UK already has actions and policies in place to support competitors' emotional wellbeing during the Skills Competitions. This ethos of support and encouragement has been felt by a wide range of competitors. This included Skills Champions who had positive and successful experiences, but crucially also includes competitors who did not necessarily have good experiences overall, but appreciated that WorldSkills UK had done everything it could to make them feel positive about themselves and about the Skills Competitions.

A key example is the competitor who felt isolated and stressed as the first female competitor at nationals in her STEM Skills Competition and left with a bad impression of the way that women are treated in male-dominated skills. Even so, when asked what WorldSkills UK could have done to make her feel more supported, she was clear that she already felt like it had made a real effort towards supporting competitors and could not think of how it could do more.

"They're great – really trying very hard to support wellbeing and make sure that everyone is relaxed. No complaints."

This feeling of support also extended to perceptions of the Skills Competition Judges. Not only did all Skills Champions say in interview that they had positive impressions of the Judges, four specifically identified the Judges as having made the biggest difference to them feeling included, valued, and capable.

"The Judges were so down to earth – giving a wee bit of banter. Meant I never felt like I couldn't possibly talk to them. If I were in an environment that was strict, I wouldn't have wanted to be there."

On the other hand, it is worth noting that one employer felt that there was a practical way in which Judges and COPs could provide a greater feeling of support and encouragement to competitors.

"But one thing to encourage students is to provide marks of the products ASAP. They used to do that, but it doesn't happen now. When they don't get their scores, that drags young people down. That's a big part of support for the student – also for me, so that I know how best to support them in the future."

One Skills Champion in particular felt supported by WorldSkills UK throughout her role as a Skills Champion. Although other Skills Champions had suggested that women may be comparatively reluctant to sign up for the role given its public-facing responsibilities, this woman has three children and feels strongly that WorldSkills UK supports her to adapt her schedule flexibly around her home commitments.

"Childcare is difficult, but as a Skills Champion you're given time to organise things if you can, and WorldSkills UK are understanding if you can't – they're not judgey, they say OK thanks for telling me, and [the Skills Champion manager] said that was absolutely fine."

For competitors who go on to compete internationally, WorldSkills UK also provides Training Managers and Performance Coaches. For both of these roles, support to competitors goes beyond direct skill and technique coaching; both have pastoral roles in supporting competitors' emotional wellbeing, stress management, etc., in multi-faceted roles that routinely involve working beyond their job descriptions.[64] Not only did all five of the Performance Coaches we surveyed agree that emotional and wellbeing support was a valuable part of their role, four of them further indicated that the most surprisingly important or time-consuming aspect of their role was the level of emotional and mental health support competitors needed. Training Managers, meanwhile, similarly indicated that boosting confidence and wellbeing was an important part of their role, and some highlighted how critical the home and employer support is, too.

"What drives competitors' ambition and confidence is support from home and employers."

Broadly speaking, each of these types of support are important and valued by competitors, and key to their success and self-confidence: family and peers to support pursuit of technical skills as an interest or career path; teachers and trainers to encourage technical skills to a diverse range of students, and support them towards the Skills Competitions; and WorldSkills UK and its key stakeholders to provide a welcoming environment where all competitors feel valued. Though there are examples of previous competitors and Skills Champions who have been successful even without one of these types of support, it is clear that in certain contexts, lack of support from family, teachers or employers can be a real barrier. This means that support from each of these sources should not be undervalued, or its impact on young people's self-belief underestimated.
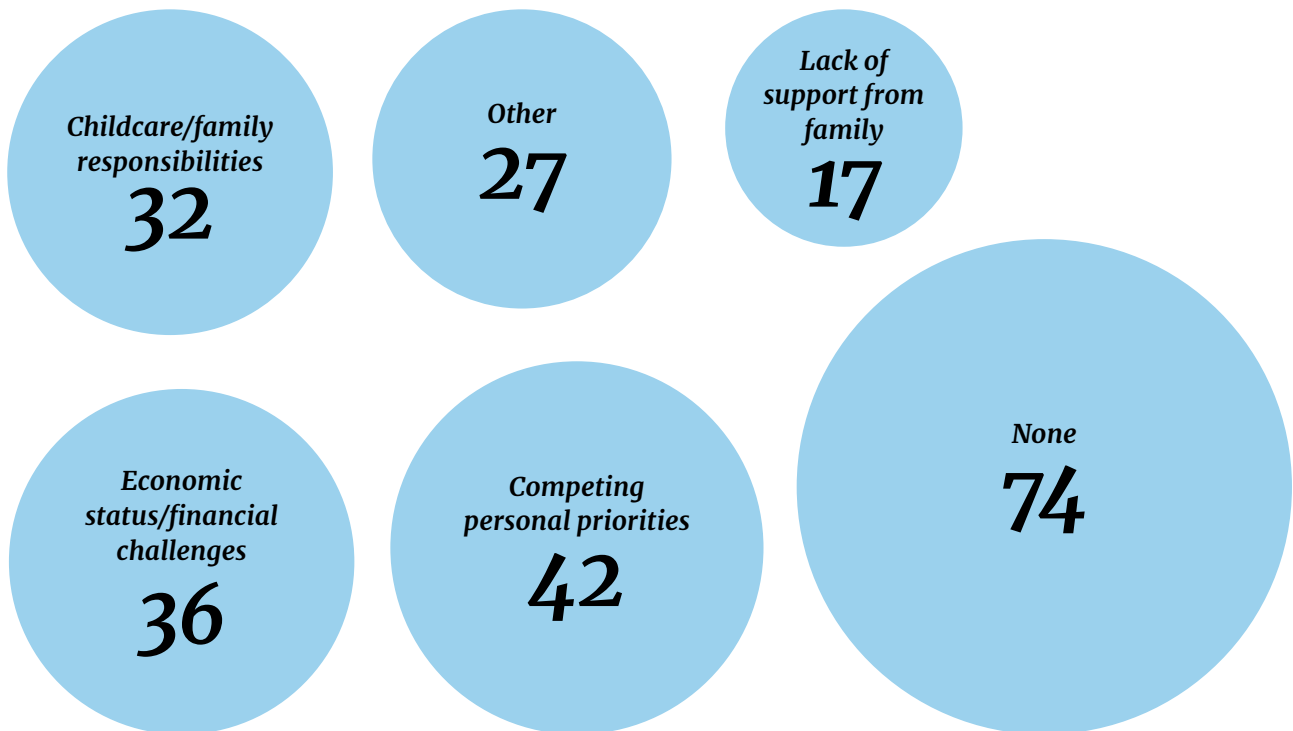
3.2 Barriers: the cost of participation

Financial status, and the difficulties faced by students from deprived households, was commonly raised as a barrier to participation. Although some students receive funding to travel and take part in nationals if they qualify, participation in the Skills Competitions also serves as a financial strain by requiring students and apprentices to need extra time to train in their skills, and take time off from studies or employment for competition days. For many, the cost of participation may seem too high when deciding whether to register, as highlighted by a Skills Champion:

"The first thought in my head when I heard about the Skills Competitions was 'oh I can't afford that.' I had to work near 60–70 hours a week around my course, working night shifts and then getting the bus to go to classes."

Generally, tutors, apprentice trainers and employers surveyed felt that they were not less likely to register certain students or trainees because of barriers they might have faced: 37% said that no barriers had prevented them from registering students, and only 18% said that economic status can be a barrier (see Figure 17).

Figure 17   **Barriers which tutors, apprentice trainers, and employers felt might prevent them from registering students for the Skills Competitions** *(participants could select more than one)*

"Which of the following may prevent you from registering certain students for the Skills Competitions?"

Childcare/family responsibilities
32

Other
27

Lack of support from family
17

Economic status/financial challenges
36

Competing personal priorities
42

None
74

Number of survey respondents

On the other hand, there were notable exceptions raised. A Deputy Principal at a diverse inner-city college felt strongly that financial status was a real barrier to their students competing: both in that students themselves struggle to afford the time taken, and in that the college struggled to provide the equipment needed to train and compete; this reflected the significant funding constraints that are felt in the FE sector This perspective was also raised by other FE colleges.

"Students had to travel and have a hotel - of course we would try to supplement that, but it can be tricky! And some of the materials are expensive."

"If a student can't get a scholarship and can't afford to travel to take part in the competition, then this could be a barrier."

Similarly, small businesses highlighted a struggle for them and for their students to spare the time and finance the equipment needed for Skills Competitions.

"I've taught people from very deprived areas, but we find that they struggle to buy the kit. The FE college I used to work at had a fund to support those who are struggling, but smaller trainers or employers don't have those resources."

At the Skills Competitions, Training Managers and Performance Coaches also see competitors facing financial barriers: 100% of Performance Coaches surveyed said that they had seen competitors with barriers resulting from economic status or financial barriers, while Training Managers echoed this with comments around loss of earnings for competitors who are taking time off to compete.

3.3 Insights: creating more robust financial support systems

This exposes a serious need for additional financial support for participants, as well as increasing awareness around what kind of compensation is available through the Skills Competitions. Each COP exercises flexibility, which is directly related to the specific skills and technical equipment required by the competitors for the Skills Competitions. Similarly, some COPs have paid roles for organising Skills Competitions, and others do not. This affects the time and resources each COP has available to focus on boosting diversity and inclusion within their Skills Competitions.

"To enter into a competition is not cost neutral – if they are an apprentice or whatever, that could be a barrier. Sometimes the young person has to apply for an annual leave day, which they're not paid for. The grant [WorldSkills UK] provide us

doesn't cover even a quarter of the costs of the delivery – some COPs give additional funding for accommodation for competitors, but not all can."

This also raises the importance of WorldSkills UK, COPs or colleges liaising with employers who are not yet involved in the scheme to think about how they might mitigate against losses to students' income, in exchange for the skills gained. WorldSkills UK themselves operate under funding constraints which limits the available financial support, and this is undoubtedly the case for many others in the sector. While the need is there, the challenge can be to source new or even reallocate funding.

3.4 Barriers: mental health and the importance of wellbeing support

Mental health and anxiety were raised just as commonly as barriers for students and competitors. For tutors, apprentice trainers, and Principals, barriers were not discussed in terms of mental health, but 25% of respondents mentioned lack of confidence as being a struggle for students.

> *"[Birmingham LIVE was] very overwhelming because of some students' lack of confidence. Very tough, very overwhelming – as a tutor, you have to prepare them for that."*

Performance Coaches, unsurprisingly, were more prone to talk about this in terms of mental health: three out of five said that they had to provide some competitors with extra support based on their mental health condition, and two identified mental health/stress management as being the main barrier for which competitors need additional support.

Several of the Skills Champions we spoke to also gave examples of their struggles with mental health or anxiety – much like the UK competitors with whom Performance Coaches work, Skills Champions by definition were successful in the Skills Competitions, so it is notable that even those who did well had faced these struggles.[vi] For many, the crucial factor which counter-balanced their stress or mental health struggles was the support and encouragement provided by their college, employer, or family, as discussed previously.

3.5 Barriers: language and narrative of the Skills Competitions

The term 'competitions,' just like the adjective 'competitive' or the verb 'compete,' has previously been identified as a strongly masculine-coded term. This is based on research that explored the role that different types of language plays in maintaining gender inequality in traditionally "male-dominated occupations."[65]

In order to influence the inclusivity of the Skills Competitions, WorldSkills UK, alongside the employers, colleges and COPs who promote, encourage and ensure participation must be conscious about how they are communicating to potential competitors.

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vi   Those who mentioned having difficulties with stress, fear, or anxiety were all female Skills Champions - it may be that men are more confident when competing in the majority, or within their stereotype-conforming skill; but it is equally possible that men are less likely to discuss their mental health struggles. Though none we spoke to flagged this as an issue, it may be worth investigating this particular risk or barrier further in future.

Ultimately, using language like 'competitions' and 'winning' could result in women self-selecting out because they believe they are intrinsically unsuitable. As per the research mentioned above, this might be more linked to a suspicion that they do not belong, rather than thinking they are not skilled enough. This is exemplified by a Skills Champion who suggested her peers might not engage because of what they identify with the term 'competitions'.

This research has also been expanded to include other marginalised groups, emphasising that subtle cues signalling the devaluation of certain social identities can lead to disengagement. Notably, a 2007 study worked to heighten the sense of belonging among Black and Latinx students in academia by normalising these students' fears about not fitting in. This ultimately increased their engagement and grades, while decreasing drop-out rates to levels comparable with their White counterparts.[66]

Other research has shown that the language we use is not limited to what is associated with traditional conceptions of 'male' and 'female' – but rather that it can be exclusive in many concepts. For example, the concept of competition has often been perceived as beneficial to higher-ability students who are skilled and have more confidence, compared with lower-ability students who do not necessarily thrive in a setting where they are forced to compare themselves with others.[67] This emphasised the need for support structures to sit alongside this new narrative (as discussed in Point 3).

"Students have different learning styles and their ability changes over time. One of them really lacked self-confidence, and we worked together to build her self-esteem and belief in herself. Not because she's a certain demographic but because I saw what she needed ... sometimes students feel they can't do something because they are a woman, or of a certain background. But it all comes down to confidence."
– Judge

Championing difference for a better workforce

3.6 Insights: addressing language in marketing

This highlights that increasing any kind of diversity across various settings must take institutional-level factors into account in their design. For instance, the wording used in recruitment materials (including mission statements) may implicitly appeal to people of a certain socioeconomic status over others. Wording associated with collectivism might appeal to people of lower socioeconomic status, versus words signalling individualism, which might more readily appeal to those from White, urban and upper-middle class backgrounds – think 'medallist', 'compete', or 'the best in the UK.' This might be a cue to those outside of this background that they do not belong, and ultimately may discourage them from applying.

For certain students, having to compare themselves with others can be demotivating.[68] For these students, competition negatively affects participation.[69] In Ghent's study, higher-ability secondary students pointed to competition as a positive aspect of their education, partly responsible for their participation and personal success; whereas those who perceived themselves as being lower-ability dreaded participation in competitive settings. This can most likely be traced back to the concept of competitions being linked to a single winner, and the potentiality of losing – both being mutually exclusive. This is very much in line with what Principals and employers have said about how they build the culture about the Skills Competitions:

> *"We advertise WorldSkills UK as the top competition you want to be in - basically, if you make this then you're competing with the top people across the country."*

> *"The culture is about being the best."*

This focus on winning, and subsequently what the term and concept of competition means to under-represented groups is a deterrent to participation. It can also explain some of the limited registration, especially at the employer level, whereby a lack of confidence in potential competitors might not inspire selection.

Past competitors have highlighted the impact that other past competitors had on their decision to participate – much of which is based on a narrative around the 'experience' rather than then end goal:

> *"Would be nice for women to be told to go in about the experience, taking part, benefits – not about winning."*

Competitor experiences highlight the need to redefine this narrative – which, as much as it might be driven by international standards and expectations, subtly exclude the groups that would bring true diversity, and therefore innovation. One COP thinks the goals of the Skills Competitions should be reframed:

> *"The 'Further, faster' tag is dangerous in that it only focuses on competing."*

Conversely, from Skills Champions who were terrified to engage with the process, through to the female competitors in STEM who were stressed from the pressure of the competition, many who have been through the process already strongly believe that the competitive element is necessary:

"I do believe that at the end of the day it's a competition, and it may sound mean but it's not okay to reward everybody just the same, when someone worked really, really hard. It might be the guy with learning difficulties that sat through afternoon after afternoon for months and got first place, but then everybody gets the same prize – it is a competition, and sadly it cannot cater to everybody's problems, it cannot mould to everybody."

These considerations lead to a set of questions: What is the ultimate benefit for a young person? Is it winning? Is it the development journey? WorldSkills UK has determined that they inspire, develop, and influence, which is where its measures of success are – and the rest will be driven from that.

It seems it might be a combination of both: retaining the competitive process but focussing on the developmental journey (e.g. boost skills through competition, gain confidence through the experience, meet skilled and passionate people from across the UK, etc.) as part of the narrative to encourage diverse participation. One Principal suggested:

"It is both when we think about the pyramid of young people involved in this process. This may not be one or the other but an integration of both and where you are on the pyramid will help define this."

Ultimately, the recognition that sits behind the winning element need not be discouraged, but rather positioned as a bonus to the wider benefit that taking part in WorldSkills UK has on competitors. This cycle represents a process of development and improvement. Whilst the national and international Skills Competitions might continue to be about excellence and winning, the focus beforehand should remain on the individual development of competitors, alongside their growth. WorldSkills UK, with its partners, holds the responsibility for making this happen.

Recommendations to improve competitor support

Establish consistency across all partners through standardising Skills Competition processes

Examples include:

- Ensure consistency across all stakeholder groups (colleges, tutors, trainers, COPs etc) around financial and wellbeing support (e.g. create a 'playbook' for partners to work from)

- Establish and adopt standard operating principles for all stakeholders in the Skills Competitions (e.g. Principals, tutors, trainers, Judges, COPs) to ensure both broad and specific commitment to diversity and inclusion standards

- Develop a transparent toolkit about how to make these standard operating principles bespoke to context or roles (e.g. COPs)

Adapt the communications and marketing strategy

Examples include:

- Ensure that all social media channels (Instagram, snapchat, YouTube) are targeting diverse groups of young people – establish a campaign that speaks and appeals to young people from all backgrounds, e.g. #iwill campaign for technical skills

- Create an easily accessible and user-friendly Q&A communication channel dedicated to potential competitors so they can access additional information as needed

- Develop the WorldSkills UK brand as a diversity and inclusion Champion – this might include incorporating best practice into activity and promoting inclusion as part of the drive to acquire competitors

4

Focus Area 4: Increasing and appreciating diversity and inclusion within WorldSkills UK, the Skills Competitions, and among its partners

This focus area addresses the importance of diverse role models within the Skills Competitions, its marketing, and an appreciation of issues around diversity and inclusion within its professionals; especially for minority group members who do not often see themselves reflected in their field. As a whole, competitors lack diverse role models:

- In the WorldSkills UK Competition professionals: in 2018, Judges were 80% male, 92% White British; Managers were 86% male, 92% White British

- In the wider technical skills sector: none of the minority Skills Champions interviewed felt like they had a role model for diversity in their skill

Competitors have explicitly highlighted the impacts this lack of role models had on their competition journey. This is compounded by stakeholders in the Skills Competitions having an inconsistent understanding of barriers caused by a lack of diversity and inclusion. Although some competitors were successful in the Skills Competitions despite these barriers, the difficulties it caused for others and the universal agreement that more role models would be welcome, led to the following recommendation and associated actions:

Provide signposting to quality diversity and inclusion training and support

Although WorldSkills UK does not have the financial capability to provide direct support, they are able to signpost their partners to quality training and induction, whilst increasing the support to their own staff (including Judges and Training Managers).

"Anyone who is out of what people classify as normal … just hearing from people you can relate to is important"

WorldSkills UK is in a unique position to influence perceptions around diversity and the technical skills sector through the example it sets in its Skills Competitions. This needs to happen addressing key barriers, including: the lack of counter-stereotypical, diverse representation, within WorldSkills UK and their Skills Competitions professionals; and also professionals' sometimes limited awareness of and sensitivity towards issues around diversity. We have seen that these professionals are incredibly well received by competitors, and the impact they can have as role models should not be underestimated.

4.1 Barriers: diverse role modelling across the Skills Competition process

It is clear that, as the most accessible senior figure in an apprentice or student's professional life, tutors, trainers and employers play an important part in modelling success for their young people. 94% of tutors and apprentice trainers said they see themselves as role models to some or all their students. Similarly, although multiple Skills Competition Judges – who represent the utmost expertise in competitors' respective industries – saw themselves as role models, it is notable that in 2018, 80% of them were male, 92% were White and heterosexual and 94% did not have a disability. Because the COPs are responsible for recruiting Judges, they were asked to comment on the importance of recruiting a diverse pool of adjudicators. 33% of COPs queried did not believe that enhancing diversity across the adjudication teams was a priority. Several of them even mentioned the importance of avoiding positive discrimination in this area, as opposed to recognising that perhaps the same social dynamics which have resulted in low levels of diversity among competitors could be at play in preventing diversity among their adjudicators.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, then, none of the minority Skills Champions we spoke to felt like they had any role models to look to during this experience (although one did mention that her female tutor was very supportive); additionally, none had known any Skills Champions before them. Everyone said, however, that having a role model would have been useful for them in their journey.

"It would have been helpful, to hear what the experience has done for them, how it's advanced their career."

For these competitors, the Skills Competitions nevertheless ended up being a very positive experience; many of them now want to go on to be role models for others and encourage students from similar backgrounds to take part.

"I like to think I help promote women into a male-dominated environment. I'm happy to show people what they can do!"

"I want to show people that you won't always have ups, that you will have downs ... I tell students now that that was my story, and that I worked really hard in the competitions and got into university without many GCSEs"

Many stakeholders raised the importance of role models for encouraging students of all backgrounds to participate. Some described a cycle where it is difficult to attract women or ethnic minorities (or men, for beauty industries) because young people do not see themselves represented in the field; but then as a result, courses and training programmes continue to be low on diversity, and therefore continue to lack role models. A college tutor emphasised for example that role models can have a disproportionately large effect: that even having one is enough to break the overall stereotype and trigger and ongoing snowball effect:

"The Principal is very much advertising the fact we need girls in the trades, but it's hard to get one or two to take the step! It always takes that one brave one. When it works out well and there's good feedback, that will encourage more."

This call for role models was echoed by a female LGBT Skills Champion in a STEM sector:

"Anyone who is out of what people classify as normal, or the standards of gender or sexual orientation – just hearing from people you can relate to is important."

For others, lack of representation had an explicitly negative effect on their confidence. One competitor, for example, described in a focus group how she had been the first ever female in her Skills Competition at nationals, and the way in which that pressure tainted her experience:

"I felt this huge pressure, like it was always 'you're the first woman, you're the first woman!' and there were no women around me at all. It was very unnerving … it was extra pressure, because then if you fail, then you fail all the women in the world. So, I was so upset at the end."

Despite this and the obvious ongoing need for more change some note that progress is slowly happening.

"In terms of being female, this year was the highest percentage in engineering sectors I think."

"A lot more females are now coming into the construction area."

The problem remains that this change can be slow, and dependent on having some role models available in the first place. Making the most of existing role models is ultimately a marketing exercise.

4.2 Insights: changing who potential competitors see

WorldSkills UK conducts UK-wide marketing campaigns to raise awareness of their Skills Competitions and encourage participation. Means for advertising include: posters, an active social media presence, a range of information and guidance documents on their website, and an extensive word of mouth network.

For marketing and communications to have a positive impact on inclusion and diversity, it must both reach a wide range and number of people, and then be effective for those who see it. The compelling majority of stakeholders we heard from found the marketing to be effective and a positive factor for diversity; however, a common point was raised that more could be done to get this positive branding out to more people. This can also help reinforce WorldSkills UK as a diversity and inclusion champion.

Marketing materials for the 2018 WorldSkills UK Competitions did not specifically mention diversity, inclusion, or outreach; however, the photographs used to portray skilled competitors represented a range of counter-stereotypical people (such as women in STEM skills or ethnic minorities). This positive portrayal of non-traditional skill roles was noticed by many, and while none voiced a problem with this strategy in interview, some anonymous White British male respondents (Principals, tutors and employers) voiced disagreement in their survey answers, which may ultimately link to a lack of awareness of issues around diversity.

"Some imagery where females are in a male–dominated industry can sometimes look false."

In stark contrast, however, students and competitors that we spoke to highlighted how helpful they found it to see representations of themselves in counter-stereotypical skills, even if it was not strictly 'realistic'. Here, even representations of people competitors do not know, who are clearly part of an overt diversity campaign, seem to be having a positive impact. This was particularly well-described by female competitors in a focus group on women in STEM:

"Seeing diverse marketing is good – you see women scientists, or advertisements with interracial couples. You have so much segregation, so it's good to normalise things – so that people can feel like 'well that's like me.' If [marketing women in STEM] is the way to catch more women, then why not?"

Encouragingly, many of the tutors, Principals, and employers we spoke to mentioned active attempts to use diverse representation in their marketing and recruitment campaigns for students and apprentices:

"I created my website logo to have both pink and blue, to represent men and women; I make sure I have images of students of all ethnicities."

It is important, then, that competitors feel reflected across all parts of the Skills Competitions process.

GOOD PRACTICE

Adjusting adjudication teams for diversity

The Association of Colleges (AoC) Sport has made changes to their adjudication teams to ensure they are comprised of a diverse cohort of Judges. A few years ago, the gender split was not ideal - but they have been working on changing that. Since it is not possible for them to affect competitor entry, they wanted to ensure that the Judge pairings and management team always reflect an even gender split. They have also made sure all their promotional materials reflect this gender split, and this has changed the way the competitions are received overall.

4.3 Insights: inclusivity in content and process

WorldSkills UK should take stock of places where competition content and operations can be adjusted to be more inclusive. For instance, a hairdressing Judge raised that his competition is not fully inclusive because of the content:

"Most hairstyles are done on European hair, and this might deter some from entering."

Notably, the COP that organises this competition mentioned that including other forms of hairdressing had not been successful in the past:

"Afro-Caribbean hairdressing is specialised. We have tried to include it in the Skills Competitions, but interest was minimal. There was a mixture between lack of interest and lack of knowledge about [them]. People go into Afro-Caribbean hairdressing much later - they tend to qualify in European hair and then diversify later on"

It is possible that this is indicative of a self-fulfilling cycle, namely that interest may have been minimal because there was a lack of diverse entrants in the first place, meaning that the COP would have struggled to secure a good number of entries. This cycle must be disrupted by tackling the issue from both ends: driving higher numbers of diverse registrants and ensuring that when they arrive at the Skills Competition, the content is relevant and inclusive of all.

It is also worth examining where simple adjustments can be made to operational aspects of the Skills Competitions to make competitors feel more included. This might include creating prayer rooms on site at the WorldSkills UK LIVE facilities, or as one Judge mentions, making considerations for trans competitors where necessary:

> "WorldSkills UK needs to provide the right support and options for those who are transitioning."

GOOD PRACTICE

Modifying equipment to ensure accessibility

Northland College makes sure that the IT competitions they put together are accessible in every way. The equipment they use can be modified to suit anyone who needs adapted equipment. In response to a past competitor with vision impairment, they worked to change the displays to accommodate them better.

Ultimately, taking audit of where the opportunities lie to adjust aspects of the content and process to be more inclusive will contribute to increasing diversity across the board.

4.4 Barriers: awareness of diversity issues among Skills Competitions professionals

Lack of appreciation for the barriers that people with protected characteristics can face, is in itself a form of prejudice: by believing that there are no barriers, people are both less likely to actively engage in making the system fairer, and can also be implicitly discouraging people from diverse backgrounds from feeling supported, and progressing. This is the case across many spheres of UK society, and it is important to address these beliefs and raise awareness of the realities of barriers within the WorldSkills UK stakeholders.

Breakout 4: What do WorldSkills UK stakeholders think about the value of diversity?

Within the context of the WorldSkills UK Competitions, there is a wide range of perspectives on the value of diversity from key people involved. Generally, while few went so far as to say that diversity had no role or importance in their skill sector, many were unwilling to agree that it was a current issue, or a priority to be addressed. This is quite possibly reflective of people's awareness of 'political correctness', such that few are willing to overtly discuss their prejudiced beliefs; instead, the most common manifestation of prejudiced attitudes toward race or gender is through the denial of issues faced by these groups, and lack of willingness to address imbalance.[70]

Insights from surveys and interviews show a relative lack of awareness of diversity issues among teachers and apprentice trainers, and even Performance Coaches. When asked in the survey, whether diversity is a current issue in their industry, 67% indicated that they either were not sure, or that they disagreed with this perspective.

There was a difference in views between Principals, tutors, employers and Training Managers based on their own demographics; predominantly, based on whether they were White or BAME (see Figure 15). Although many of the White British stakeholders agreed and recognised that diversity is an issue, and from interviews have suggested active ways they try to address it, there is still a clear difference on average that fewer are aware of the issue than their BAME counterparts. This was particularly stark in the case of competition Training Managers, where only heterosexual White British managers did not agree that diversity is an issue in the skills sector (see Figure 18).

Similarly, in terms of the Skills Competitions themselves, many White British Judges agreed that it is necessary for WorldSkills UK to increase diversity amongst its pool of competitors but were the only group also to have members who disagree (see Figure 19).

Comments from those who did not feel that diversity was a current issue generally indicated a view that their sector is, in fact, diverse:

"Haven't seen it as an issue in the sectors I have had experience with: Fitness, Hair & Beauty, Culinary Skills, Restaurant Service, Automotive, Customer Service, Accountancy, Enterprise"

Figure 18 **Percentage of Principals, tutors, Training Managers and employers who agree that diversity is a current issue in the skills sector, broken down by stakeholder ethnicity grouping**

To what extent do you agree with the following statement: "Diversity is a current issue in the skills sector"?

Figure 19 Number of WorldSkills UK Judges who think it is necessary for WorldSkills UK to focus on increasing diversity among competitors, broken down by Judge ethnicity grouping
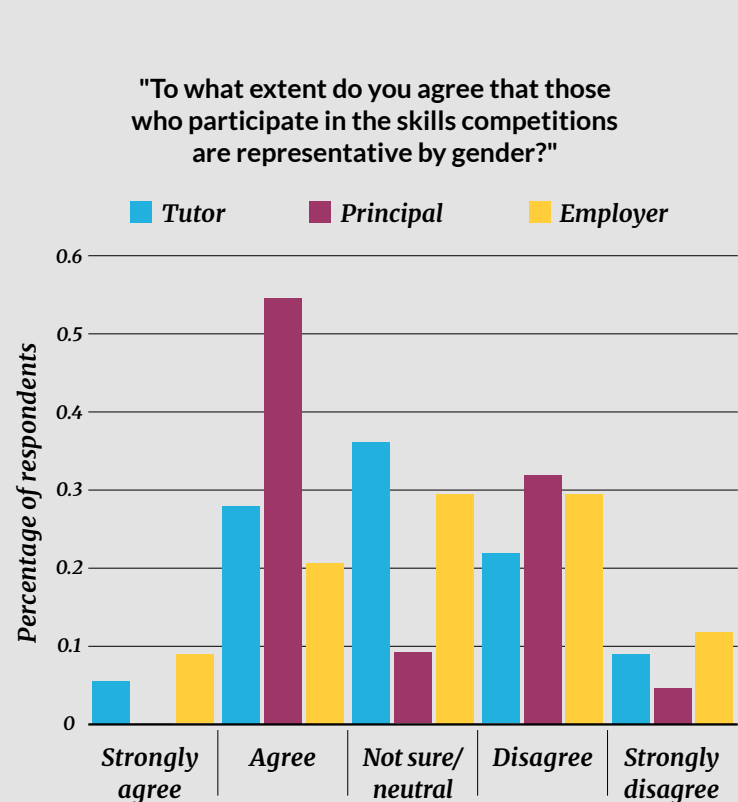
"Do you think it is necessary for WorldSkills UK to focus on increasing diversity among competitors?"

Figure 20 Extent to which tutors, Principals, and employers agree that diversity is a current issue in the skills sector

"To what extent do you agree that those who participate in the skills competitions are representative by gender?"

Yet within this particular tutor's college, competitors in each of these listed Skills Competitions were entirely White British (or, for a couple of competitors, no ethnicity given).

In addition, many realised the challenges of particularly gender-segregated sectors making it difficult to promote and manage diversity, including one apprentice trainer whose desire to recruit more girls into their male-dominated engineering sector is offset by their awareness of the difficulty they may then have supporting girls into employment.

"If there were a lot of girls, it might be difficult to place them all – employers might be sceptical of employing a girl. Old–fashionedness, you know. We know the ones that would definitely say no to a girl. It's not right, but it's just the way it is."

If these authority figures do not value diversity, or remain biased toward under-appreciating the barriers facing certain students and their impact, they themselves may become barriers to diversity and inclusion, knowingly or otherwise. (Figure 20)

College Principals, on the other hand, were considerably more likely to agree that diversity is a current issue, and the least likely to be unsure (see Figure 18). This may reflect the greater strategic responsibility of Principals, compared with tutors, for recruitment and their student body; and more direct involvement with education policy and college networking around the UK. While it is disappointing that of the employers surveyed, a high proportion (71%) either were not sure or disagreed that diversity is an issue, none volunteered information on why this might be the case.

The assumption that diversity may be mutually exclusive from meritocracy arose in comments from college tutors, employers, competition Training Managers and Judges. Given the fact that BAME and other counter-stereotypical groups are underrepresented in the skills sector, people's interpretation can either be that these groups face unfair barriers, or that they have (on average) less talent or merit. Those who see positive action as being "unfair" are likely therefore to see the skill sector as being a true meritocracy, where the only barrier faced by minority groups is overt prejudice or discrimination, which all agree should be avoided.

"All positions should be based on merit and nothing else."

Belief in an existing meritocracy undervalues other more pervasive barriers, the role that everyone plays in them, and the need for this balance to be redressed – including the real lack of skill that the skills and trade sectors face by limiting their pool of talent. The positive benefit of diversity itself is therefore under-appreciated and held to be less important than ideas of "the best."

For example, the science sector prides itself on being apolitical, gender-neutral and colour-blind' and so fails to bring discussions about sexual identity into the space. Conversations need to be had about what barriers are present in education and the workplace – and acknowledge their weight for different demographic groups. However, this can only be achieved where an inclusive culture reigns.

Championing difference for a better workforce

4.5 Insights: supporting Competition Organising Partners' commitment to diversity and inclusion

Due to the fact that Competition Organising Partners (COPs) work very differently across their respective industries, whilst there are standards for delivery, there is no standardisation in terms of how they go about organising Skills Competitions. This means that while there is often commitment to improve, they all have varied understandings of how to enhance diversity and inclusion within the Skills Competitions as well as the wider sector. 100% of the COPs who were asked whether they think it is important to promote diversity and inclusion within the Skills Competitions responded affirmatively.

"Yes, everyone should recognise that competition is open to all … Competition can widen the skill set that a young person has … The more that we can embrace that, the more that the industry can improve."

Though some identified that this is difficult to do in practice:

"We have three meetings a year with WorldSkills UK, which talk about KPIs that include diversity. We are all trying, but it's very industry specific."

"At our COP meeting we need to arrange to do the same thing rather than doing it in silos."

"Within the Skills Competition we don't necessarily promote either of those things. Competitors can indicate if they have a disability. It's important to be inclusive but there are limits to what people can do."

Only 14% of COPs were surprised by the 2018 competitor statistics (90% White, 67% male and 5% identifying as having a disability or learning difficulty). The majority were well aware that a lack of diversity across the Skills Competitions is an issue. There was general agreement among COPs that these statistics are reflective of the colleges engaged, but also of the makeup of the industries more widely.

"Our own industry does tend to be 80%+ White and 90%+ male. The landscaping industry does tend to attract people who have struggled academically at school, although they may not have a learning difficulty. We have to try and improve the amount of female entrants that we have (female entrants find the competition quite tough, the physicality of the competition – the early rounds are more dextrous, require more precision; more generally women in the industry are very good at the slightly more intellectual tasks)."

An interesting pattern emerged among a number of COPs in terms of their understanding of the barriers to entry that competitors with certain protected characteristics may face. Multiple COPs mentioned that their competitions were as 'open' as possible, and that they were not sure why there were not more diverse competitors coming through the door. This signals a lack of understanding about the difference between active barriers (i.e. outright discrimination) versus a situation where certain competitors have not been enabled to participate as a result of a larger systemic issue – for instance, that BAME students are less likely to be encouraged to enrol in additional academic programmes,[71] or that girls are not encouraged from an early age to pursue extra-curricular STEM opportunities.[72]

"As a COP, we try to be as inclusive to the whole of UK as possible, in terms of those who might be attracted to competing. We do social media campaigns so all ages and all people across the country might see it, therefore including all backgrounds... We are inclusive as much as possible."

"We work really hard to encourage our partners to be as inclusive as possible. But this is difficult in some respects – you can't force people to do competitions, but you have to be as open as possible."

Championing difference for a better workforce

Recommendations to increase and appreciate the value of diversity and inclusion

Provide signposting to quality Diversity and Inclusion training and support

Examples include:

- Signpost to quarterly or bi-annual diversity and inclusion training and induction (e.g. with Fearless Futures or other similar provider) to all stakeholders in the system and require attendance and commitment to participate in the competitions

- Across all stakeholder groups, upskill Training Managers on strategies for managing diverse teams so they can sustain them over time

5

Focus Area 5: Forming a clear vision and narrative around diversity and inclusion across WorldSkills UK and its partners

This focus area addresses the need for a common diversity and inclusion vision and narrative across the WorldSkills UK ecosystem – building on WorldSkills UK's convening power and influence to encourage good practice. It builds on an opportunity for WorldSkills UK to brand itself as and support its partners to be Diversity and Inclusion Champions, addressing key barriers at a partnership level:

- Strategic stakeholders suggest that organisations work too much in silo when it comes to diversity and inclusion

- There is a disconnect around branding, values, narratives and the stories that are being told and shared about the Skills Competitions.

Aiming to facilitate learning, showcase best practice, to link up activity, perceptions and narratives and to award positive action on diversity and inclusion is an important first step. The natural follow-on for this is how WorldSkills UK leads the way on a global stage through WorldSkills International, with the following recommendations:

Create tools and guidelines showcasing what works to support partners to achieve diversity and inclusion goals

In supporting its partners to deliver the Skills Competitions, WorldSkills UK can embed diversity and inclusion from the start, by providing platforms through which good practice can be showcased, encouraging colleges and employers to support peer mentoring, and increasing the breadth of research to improve this activity across the ecosystem.

Lead by example in driving diversity and inclusion internally and in the Skills Competitions

The WorldSkills UK network and its Skills Competitions can only change with WorldSkills effecting that change internally, and sharing insight and learning from their experience. This has already started and can be continued and improved through integration of competitor feedback.

"It would be useful to know what the forward intention is – most people want to do right by this programme, but we need clear strong deliverables shared among the networks."

"It's very much about looking at what they're trying to communicate [with diversity and inclusion]. The message from WorldSkills UK isn't as clear as it needs to be."
– Competition Organising Partner

To be driving the kind of change that WorldSkills UK truly cares about, a clear vision of priorities, strategies for how to address them, and a clear message for how they would like others to follow suit is needed. Within this, the targets for the WorldSkills UK competitions needs to be considered and its overall goals made clear, before the further steps can be taken.

5.1 Barriers: inconsistent narratives around diversity and inclusion

Currently, individual stakeholders operate too frequently in silos: they work to support one another in the delivery of the Skills Competitions, but do not necessarily share a vision or set of outcomes, nor the benefits or responsibilities that come with diversity and inclusion across the competitions. This causes a disconnect around branding, values, narratives and the stories that are being told and shared about the Skills Competitions.

For diversity and inclusion targets to be on track across the ecosystem, they need to be aligned to ensure support is accessible, that one vision drives all stakeholders, and that the underlying narrative of benefits and purpose is the same.

"It would be useful to know what the forward intention is – most people want to do right by this programme, but we need clear strong deliverables shared among the networks. It has to be spelled out clearly and upfront. We want to know the why and the how, and a framework would be useful so that we don't do what everybody does which is to turn a blind eye." – COP

This can help prevent situations in which bias or barriers are accepted or left unaddressed, which can be destructive to the entire Diversity and Inclusion agenda.

"Disability in Skills Competitions is spoken about with the people running these competitions, not in the group of 50 COPs together running mainstream competitions. When you have one person from one industry saying things like, 'Well you can't be a mechanic if you only have one arm' this immediately shuts down the conversation." – COP

5.2 Insights: linking up activity, perceptions and activities

These barriers could be addressed by creating a platform to connect COPs to others who have faced similar barriers (and potentially addressed them), which could help unify the WorldSkills UK family whilst increasing its ability to shape the diversity and inclusion culture across the network.

A partnership platform would not only enable good practice to be shared but would also help to bridge some of the gaps around what the outcomes are, the language and the vision. The UN has done this well; it has created a voluntary platform for actors to provide examples of good practice relating to the Sustainable Development Goals, where voluntary commitments enable flexibility whilst facilitating access to information. One of its key learnings was around its own internal system and the importance of having a single access point for partners - this platform could perhaps serve a dual purpose as that access point. In addition, it could host relevant forums and discussions, as well as hold relevant documents around the vision and narrative of WorldSkills UK Competitions, and advice and support around building inclusive cultures in that context – ultimately linking up activity and narratives through a single point of access.

It could also be useful to establish a cross-sector commission. There is currently no longer a Commission for Employment and Skills (CES) due to the withdrawal of government funding – yet the need to support FE and Apprentice networks has not diminished, especially when it comes to diversity and inclusion.

There is room for WorldSkills UK, alongside key partners, to lead on developing a WorldSkills UK Commission on Diversity and Inclusion in the Skills Sector. Apart from facilitating discussion, knowledge-sharing and further research into how to do this well, it has the potential to help link up key partners across a shared vision and "get them on course" to foster public debate and collaborative action.

Separately and offline, this is about reimagining some of the current roles that exist and how they might be best utilised and supported to help link conversations and share insight across locations or sectors. For example, regional ambassadors are an essential part of the WorldSkills UK ecosystem – their roles could be revisited to ensure better communication and linkages. As one of those ambassadors highlights:

> *"[WorldSkills UK rely on] regional ambassadors from across the UK. These roles should be redefined – we pull the colleges together in our region, and are 'influencers'."*
>
> *– College Principal and regional ambassador*

This is a question of revisiting job descriptions and considering the role that diversity and inclusion plays across these individuals and the wider groups, as well as how to make it a recurring agenda item and part of the wider culture. This could also include, for example, starting a Youth Ambassadors Group which works alongside the Regional Ambassadors to specifically promote diversity and inclusion. This group could also support with changing narratives in secondary schools.

Linking up the ecosystem moves beyond showcasing and facilitating learning or even aligning behind a shared commission or plan. It is also about developing a clear, shared vision around diversity and inclusion with partners, and providing support to stakeholders to integrate this vision across their activity.

5.3 Insights: championing diversity and inclusion

Redefining the narrative about the Skills Competitions and their benefits and value to competitors provides a prime opportunity to think about how diversity and inclusion fits into the Skills Competitions more explicitly.

Diversity and inclusion are not something which has been a categorical driver of performance or excellence in past WorldSkills UK Competitions. However, there is a strong appreciation for the need for this to change – and therefore an appreciation of the role WorldSkills UK can take on to drive this.

Of the competitors we spoke to, the majority agreed that trying to increase the diversity of the competitors across the Skills Competitions was important, and gave reasons mainly relating to morality and the benefit to young people themselves. Women in STEM, in particular, were some of the strongest advocates for greater diversity in the Skills Competitions.

"At the end of the day, we're all people."

"You have to show that everyone can do it if they put their mind to it."

"It's a stepping-stone for young professionals to gain experience at industry level and above. It will give them confidence and something to put on their CV to attain more and aim higher."

Ultimately, WorldSkills UK must proactively change the narrative across its programme offer. This might include continuing to build diversity and inclusion into branding and marketing in an attempt to attract key partners and supporters to position WorldSkills UK as a potential trailblazer within the skills sector. This might also be about revisiting communications campaigns around diversity and inclusion, and exploring the fact that for those interviewed, the term 'inclusive' mainly brought up images around disability, which may be limiting given the breadth of what these concepts could encompass within organisational culture as a whole.

5.4 Insights: embedding cultures and targets for inclusion

In order to influence access and representation, creating a culture of inclusion – be it at WorldSkills UK, any of its partners, stakeholders or across its wider networks - is essential. This begins with understanding and appreciating the value of being more diverse and inclusive, through to ensuring that the leadership in place proactively adapts ways of working and engaging to harness the benefits that diversity brings. This has previously been managed through a mix of awareness-raising and mindset change (and ultimately behaviour change) to focus on shifting perceptions of equality.

In order to correct the above assumption that the passive openness of a given programme is equivalent to the absence of barriers for minorities, it is important to foster a deeper understanding of the ways in which entrenched systems of discrimination affect various groups of people with protected characteristics. Ultimately, WorldSkills UK is in a position to lead this shift amongst its partners.

This shift begins with an internal audit of the state of diversity within the organisation, setting recruitment targets and sharing the results of the audit and a plan of action with partners. WorldSkills UK can also signpost and encourage Diversity & Inclusion training to all partners which uses a more progressive approach (see Fearless Futures as an example), requiring partners' attendance to participate in the competitions. Further, partner organisations need to do more to

prepare their staff for managing diverse teams and to mitigate the 'meritocracy blind spot' mentioned above, so they can more readily identify and address the barriers faced by some of their incoming registrants. Finally, WorldSkills UK could consider creating Standard Operating Principles for all partners, including colleges, so commitment to diversity and inclusion is standardised across the WorldSkills UK ecosystem.

GOOD PRACTICE

Setting clear Diversity & Inclusion targets to engage minority students

Part of Association for Colleges (AoC) Sport's continuous improvement plan for the competition (separate from AoC's wider plan) includes tangible actions, and Diversity & Inclusion always has its own section. This is constantly evolving: at one point, there was an action about increasing male-female ratios, but now that that's stabilised, their 2019 priority is students from low socio-economic backgrounds.

Building cultures of inclusion to increase diversity requires a long-term shift in both attitude and practice over time; but there are steps WorldSkills UK can take to set this process in motion for their own teams and for those working across their partner networks.

5.5 Insights: facilitating learning and sharing good practice

Many approaches and models to support diversity and inclusion have thrived, and as many have failed. WorldSkills UK has the opportunity, through its convening power, to help showcase and reward positive activity whilst enabling the sharing of learning and positive approaches amongst its networks. With time, the associated impact across FE and the skills sector could be profound.

Demonstrating what works is a good way to shift passive reflection into action. Also, the value of transparency in terms of what does not work for diversity and inclusion can have positive knock-on effects that could help upskill entire sectors.

> ## GOOD PRACTICE
>
> **The Failure Foundation's 'F***-up Nights'**
>
> The Failure Foundation prides itself on celebrating challenges and helping people in its networks to learn from one another and avoid replicating mistakes. One of the ways in which it has done this has been through a series of TED-talk style nights which launched in Mexico City and have since run in over 200 cities. These nights bring together leaders across public, private and social sectors to share professional failures. Apart from events, they run a blog series and conduct research into what leads to these mistakes, and how to avoid them.

Some stakeholders identified a clear struggle around how to increase diverse participation, which points to a need for models and approaches to be disseminated at all levels to facilitate progress toward WorldSkills UK's diversity and inclusion goals.

*"It's very hard – diversity can only go as far as students we have enrolled and want to do it. But it's one of those things – you can't help who applies for the course." – **Apprentice tutor***

WorldSkills UK's broad range of networks means the organisation can also influence practice by providing a platform to encourage diversity and inclusion and building the capacity of partners by rewarding those who exemplify the culture and values it holds dear. Additionally, it can hold its partners accountable for delivering on diversity targets. This can take several forms, from hosting awards, to developing diversity and inclusion focused communications plans and establishing platforms for stakeholders to learn from one another. It can also mean learning from what has worked in other sectors.

For example, every year WorldSkills UK hosts WorldSkills UK LIVE, which brings together over 70,000 visitors, including competitors, schools, employers and colleges. This event would be a perfect opportunity to recognise those who have gone above and beyond through an awards ceremony, to showcase stakeholders who have exemplified inclusive cultures and diverse representation. The awards could have the dual benefit of WorldSkills UK identifying examples of good practice, which can then be shared with the rest of the sector to facilitate learning. Alternatively, WorldSkills UK could consider building on some international indices or kitemarks around benchmarking diversity and inclusion best practice. There are a few existing benchmarks that already exist within the Diversity and Inclusion sector, like the Race Equality Charter Mark, which "works to improve the representation, progression and success of minority ethnic staff and students within higher education."[73]

On the employment front, Business in the Community's Diversity Benchmark is shifting into an in-depth assessment of diversity and inclusivity in organisations.

WorldSkills UK could either adapt or use one of these benchmarks to consider what a kitemark could look like for diversity and inclusion in the Skills Competitions and/or wider technical skills sector.

Additionally, showcasing good practice requires emulating that practice internally, and being transparent about its impact and challenges. As part of this effort, WorldSkills UK needs to be sharing its learning on its own journey with the wider ecosystem. This could take the form of a review of its efforts and activity, and a data-driven approach to analysing the organisation's own efforts toward a more inclusive culture. PWC is a great example of this, where both the data on its staff and lessons learned are publicly available to help increase insight around implementing diversity and inclusion practices within other organisations, within the context of different sizes and functions of other organisations (for a comparison with WorldSkills UK's operational model size, see Appendix 6).

5.6 Insights: support needs should drive diversity and inclusion strategy

As discussed previously, there is a dearth of knowledge around how to do diversity and inclusion well. WorldSkills UK could develop a set of objectives and measurement metrics to track its progress, and to enable its partners to align to them.

Novations and Linkage's 2009 study explored diversity and inclusion within scores of companies of all sizes and across many industries. A key learning for WorldSkills UK and its partners is the need to embed and link diversity and inclusion metrics into the organisations' highest-level goals where these do not yet exist.

GOOD PRACTICE

The Novations Group's Diversity Best Practices

The Diversity Best Practices created by the Novations Group suggests asking a set of questions to ensure organisations can effectively embed a diversity and inclusion vision and associated objectives into the culture and strategy of the organisation:

- At the highest level, what is the organisation seeking to accomplish?

- What are the critical success factors?

- How do diversity, inclusion, and engagement affect the success factors? What do diversity, inclusion, and engagement have to do with achieving the critical successes that will lead to the organisation's overall success?

- What specifically will diversity, inclusion, and engagement success look like?

- Where does the organisation stand with all of this currently? What is the current state? What is working or not working? Why? What data do we already have? What additional data do we need to collect?

- Given where the organisation is currently, where does it need to go next? What behaviours must change? In other words, what now needs to happen with respect to diversity, inclusion, and engagement, so that the organization's overarching critical success factors are achieved?

- What actions must be taken to achieve the desired results? What are the tactics for moving from the current state to the desired future state?

- What data will tell us if the required changes are happening, including behaviour changes? What data will tell us if the changes are having the intended impact?

In addition, the role that tutors and trainers play in the WorldSkills UK ecosystem is invaluable. Pre-registration, these individuals support the competitors to improve and develop the necessary capabilities to compete – often spending unpaid time to do so, and relying on their own commitment to see their students succeed. There is an opportunity to address some of this by facilitating conversations and helping tutors, employers, or partners flag their challenges and needs, potentially relying on one another across colleges, COPs or employers to help address this.

"You do have to put in extra training sessions, because if you don't, then the chances of getting through is minimal. Students know that they have to work hard to up their skills, and put work in at home. I used to put in mentoring sessions with 1:1 training. It takes a very very dedicated tutor to do that."
– WorldSkills UK tutor

One COP's perception was that marketing strategies would be improved if the partnerships between WorldSkills UK and COPs were strengthened:

"Promotion in the right places, go to where the potential competitors are. Magazine representations, roadshows etc. Don't rely on COPs to do it all. There's not much of a partnership between WorldSkills UK and COPs. The COP has the responsibility to promote, but there is a limit to how many people they can get into contact with. WorldSkills UK should have a wider network." – COP

Overall, strengthening partnerships can accelerate the diversity and inclusion agenda, help organisations achieve their individual diversity and inclusion targets and drive better inclusion across the whole WorldSkills UK ecosystem.

Championing difference for a better workforce

Recommendations to form a clear vision and consistent narratives

Create tools and guidelines showcasing what works to support partners to achieve diversity and inclusion goals

Examples include:

- Encourage schools and employers to create peer mentoring opportunities for past competitors and potential minority registrants

- Develop a set of awards which specifically identify key representation and inclusion targets

- Conduct additional research specifically targeted at understanding interventions and best practices around diversity and inclusion. These could then be shared back with employers, colleges, etc. to support the development of their own practices

Lead by example in driving diversity and inclusion internally and in the Skills Competitions

Examples include:

- Ensure diversity is represented throughout WorldSkills UK from the Board to staff and broader teams (e.g. recruit a young person/previous Skills Champion to be on the WorldSkills UK Board)

- Identify where Skills Competition content or operations can be tweaked to enhance inclusivity (e.g. providing prayer rooms, etc.)

- Conduct an internal diversity audit across WorldSkills UK teams and identify and address the gaps

Conclusion

Barriers to diversity and inclusion in the WorldSkills UK Competitions can be tackled. It will, however, take time, resource, and a combined effort on the part of the wider ecosystem. This can be achieved with a coordinated action plan which: works with organisations to foster inclusive cultures supported by a partnership approach; launches a shared commission; showcases good practice and provides access to tools and training to enable change across the ecosystem; brings competitors and champions to the forefront of the diversity and inclusion agenda; targets diverse areas; and enables WorldSkills UK to lead by example.

Many of these recommendations are not new to the diversity and inclusion sector – yet, once actioned, they will reflect a new way of working for WorldSkills UK and many of its partner colleges and employers. However, this needs to be done in a synchronised way which changes the status-quo, and which strategically works towards some key longer-term impacts around inclusion in the sector and wider WorldSkills family.

The golden ticket will be application and alignment: application of the findings and recommendations, starting today; and alignment around values which reinforce diversity and inclusion across the whole ecosystem.

It starts with WorldSkills UK considering their role as an employer, their role as an influencer, and how they operationalise these recommendations to drive lasting change. When thinking about ingrained societal issues around diversity and inclusion, many of these recommendations will take a significant amount of time to show results – however, WorldSkills UK can start, and they can start now.

Every small action is a step forward, which needs to be backed by ambition and a push for larger systems change. The WorldSkills UK leadership and team are committed to making change happen, and in many ways have already started: WorldSkills UK recently conducted an internal audit to understand how it as an organisation is leading by example (or needs to adapt to do so); it adapted the registration platform to ensure competitors are more involved, and that the questions around demographics are more inclusive to increase the rich data it captures; diversity and inclusion leads in each of the teams have been put in place to

spearhead action; and plans are in place to recognise good practice at the next WorldSkills UK LIVE in November.

Key partnerships, additional sources of funding, and a coordinated approach are essential. Immediate action is essential. WorldSkills UK and its wider ecosystem need to start small, think big and continuously showcase learning and the benefits of putting diversity and inclusion first.

The time is now to #gofurtherfaster to increase diversity and inclusion in the skills sector.

Appendix

Appendix 1: Glossary

Competition Organising Partners (COP): WorldSkills UK partners including industry companies, associations and Further and Higher Education organisations that organise sector-specific Skills Competitions on behalf of WorldSkills UK.

Diversity: a state in which all people have equal and inclusive access to spaces, opportunities and positions without barriers or resistance.

Inclusion: the achievement of an environment in which all individuals feel respected, are treated fairly and have equal access to opportunities and resources.

Judges: qualified industry experts recruited by Competition Organising Partners to adjudicate competitor performance during the WorldSkills Competitions.

Index of Multiple Deprivation: the official measure of relative deprivation for small areas in England. It ranks these areas from 1 (most deprived area) to 32,844 (least deprived).

Performance Coaches: professionals who support the welfare and pastoral care of competitors, including the emotional, physical health and safety of Squad and Team UK competitors.

Protected characteristics: groups defined within, and covered under, the Equality Act 2010, including: age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation.

Representation: ensuring that diverse groups of people are equally visible within an organisation or other environment.

Skills Champions: WorldSkills UK Skills Champions are members of a growing network of inspiring young professionals who have competed in a WorldSkills UK Competitions National Final. Many Champions have gone on to represent the UK internationally as part of Squad and Team UK and are out working in industry acting as inspirational role models for future generations of apprentices and young people.

STEM: subjects which fall under the categories of Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics.

Technical skills sector: technical skills industries (e.g. digital business and creative sectors, health and social care sectors, etc.) and the stakeholders which comprise them, including companies and employers, training providers, apprentices, colleges, etc.

Training Managers: technical skills professionals who are responsible for the design, delivery, quality and management of training programmes for Squad and Team UK as they prepare to compete internationally at the WorldSkills and EuroSkills Competitions.

WorldSkills UK LIVE: the UK's largest skills, apprenticeships and careers event that hosts the national finals of the WorldSkills UK Competitions.

WorldSkills UK Competitions: competitive events that test the technical ability of students and apprentices at the local, regional and national level. Age and skill eligible finalists from the WorldSkills UK Competitions are selected to join the training programme for international competitions.

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Appendix 2: Full list of Acknowledgments

Thank you to all WorldSkills Competition Organising Partners who completed an online survey and/or took part in a telephone interview, including:

Cambrian Training
Association of Colleges (AoC)
Construction Industry Training Board (CITB)
Goldsmiths
Northland College
Semta
Horticultural Trades Association (HTA)
North Warwickshire and South Leicestershire College (NWSLC)
Institute of the Motor Industry (IMI)
British Floristry Association
British Plumbing Employers Council (BPEC)
Net Services
L'Oréal
Siemens

Thank you to all college tutors and Principals who completed an online survey and/or took part in a telephone interview, including tutors and Principals from:

Accrington & Rossendale College
Ayrshire College
Barking & Dagenham
Barnet and Southgate College
Bath College
Belfast Metropolitan College
Birkenhead Sixth Form
Birmingham Metropolitan
Bishop Auckland College
Blackburn College
Blackpool and The Fylde College
Borders College
Boston College
Bournemouth and Poole
Bradford College
Bridgend College
Bridgwater & Taunton College
Broadstairs College
Brooklands College
Burnley College
Burton and South Derbyshire College
CAFRE, Greenmount Campus
Cardiff and Vale College
Carlisle College

Cheshire College South & West
Cheshire College South and West
Chichester College
City College Plymouth
City of Liverpool College
Coleg Cambria
Coleg Cambria Yale Wrexham
Coleg Ceredigion
Coleg Gwent
Coleg Menai, Llangefni
Coleg Merthyr
Coleg Sir Gar
Coleg y Cymoedd
College of North West London
Cornwall College
Craven College Skipton
Derwentside College
Doncaster College
Dudley College of Technology
Dundee and Angus College
East Coast College
East Durham College
East Kent College, Folkestone
East Norfolk Sixth Form College
East Sussex College Group, Eastbourne
Eastleigh
Easton & Otley college
Edinburgh College
EKC Group
Exeter College
Farnborough College of Technology
Fife college
Forth Valley College
Glasgow Clyde College
Gower College Swansea
Greater Brighton Metropolitan College
Grimsby Institute Group
Grwp llandrillo Menai
Guernsey College of Further Education
Hadlow College
Halesowen College
Hartlepool College of Further Education
Havering College
Heart of Worcestershire
Highbury College, Portsmouth
Hopwood Hall College
Leeds College of Building
Leicester College
Lincoln College
Llandrillo Rhos-on-Sea
Macclesfield College
Meirion -Dwyfor, Dolgellau

Merthyr Tidfyl College
Middlesex University
MidKent College
Milton Keynes
Moray College
Moulton College
Myerscough College
Nescot
New City College
New College Durham
New College Lanarkshire
New College Stamford
Newcastle and Stafford Colleges Group (NSCG), NULC site
Newcastle College
North Kent College
North Notts College
North Warwickshire & South Leicestershire College
North West Regional College
Northern Regional College
Northumberland College
Northwest Regional College
NPTC Group of Colleges
North Somerset Enterprise and Technology College
Perth College UHI
Petroc, North Devon
Riverside College
RNN Group, Rotherham and Retford Campus
Rotherham College
Salford City College
Sheppey College
South and City College Birmingham
South Eastern Regional College
South West College
Southern Regional College
Suffolk New College
Sunderland College Group
The College Merthyr Tydfil
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The Manchester College
The Oldham College
The Sheffield College
The Trafford College Group
UTC Sheffield City Centre
Wakefield College
Walsall College

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Activate Learning
BAE Systems
BMW Group Academy
Bosch Automotive Service Solutions
Carter Academy
Clogher valley meats
Cyfle Building Skills Ltd
EC One
Educ8 Group
Ford Motor Company Ltd
Fort Vale Engineering
Humberside Engineering Training Association
Make UK
MBDA
Nova Training
On Site Bristol
Panda Education and Training Ltd
Parkway Interiors Ltd
Performance Through People Ltd
ProVQ Ltd
QinetiQ Ltd
Raytheon UK
Rhondda Cynon Taff CBC
Riverpark Training
Rogers Restorations Ltd
Royal Navy
S&B Automotive Academy
Scottish Electrical Charitable Training Trust (SECTT)
The Senator Group
Skillnet Limited
Stephenson College Coalville
Sytner BMW Nottingham
The University of Manchester
Verstegen Spices and Sauces UK
Volkswagen Group Apprentice Programme
WEC Group
West Midlands Nail & Beauty Academy
Willow & Blooms

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Appendix 3: Recommendations with supporting actions

Form new strategic partnerships with groups that can help achieve Diversity and Inclusion goals

Examples include:

- Forge partnerships with government, businesses, and others to financially sustain or endow this import work so that money is not a barrier for young people nor WorldSkills UK and partners to realise ambitions; financial support might come directly from WorldSkills UK or a sponsorship system or similar

- Forge strategic partnerships with more Independent Training Providers and employers to reach more apprentices

- Forge partnerships with relevant college or Independent Training Provider (ITP) student groups and market directly to their members; host roadshows or visits that include separate meetings with them

- Forge strategic partnerships with other national organisations or programmes working with young people in schools and colleges to encourage cross-marketing and signposting of opportunities for young people (e.g. #iwill campaign, City Year UK, Teach First, Studio Schools, UK Youth, etc.)

- Work with and support FE Colleges or Independent Training Providers (ITP) to identify local business partnerships to sponsor local registrants (e.g. create business-provider partnership frameworks or templates to support what this looks like in practice and replicate across all participating colleges)

- Create an advisory "working group" of employers to develop the business case, apprenticeship pipeline and diversity and inclusion benchmarks from an industry perspective

- Undertake more in-depth research on the role of employers as essential partners in diversity and inclusion and the Skills Competition pipeline and success

- Create an advisory "working group" of FE colleges and training providers to develop the business case, pipeline and diversity and inclusion benchmarks from an education perspective

- Add a section to the existing application for apprentices to list their employer's contact details, and follow up with relevant employers directly to encourage them to send more competitors

- Explore new partnerships with organisations working with early years students to encourage them to choose vocational trades (e.g. the Young Apprentice Ambassadors Network)

Launch a shared Commission for Diversity and Inclusion in the sector

Examples include:

- Select a set group of partners to develop a shared vision for what diversity and inclusion in skills should look like, including young people (e.g. through a roundtable or working groups)

Create tools and guidelines showcasing what works to support partners to achieve diversity and inclusion goals

Examples include:

- Encourage schools and employers to create peer mentoring opportunities for past competitors and potential minority registrants

- Encourage and facilitate social activities among competitors, such as dinners or quiz nights, to foster camaraderie

- Demonstrate how companies' marketing can be used to promote their Skills Competitors

- Highlight how employers can market their brand and scout talent at the regional and LIVE Skills Competitions

- Develop a set of awards which specifically identify key representation and inclusion targets (to be sense-checked with partners)

- Conduct additional research specifically targeted at understanding interventions and best practices around diversity and inclusion. These could then be shared back with employers, colleges, etc. to support the development of their own practices

Develop a shared vision and set targets for what diversity and inclusion in the competitions ought to look like

Examples include:

- Set annual targets for how many students and apprentices from diverse backgrounds WorldSkills UK hopes to engage in each region

- Set specific targets for the number of new minority role models WorldSkills UK hopes to engage over the next year and draw on Skills Champions and Ambassador Networks to identify them

- Encourage COPs to create targets for the recruitment of minority judges over the next 2-3 competition cycles

- Include diversity and inclusion objectives in the KPIs for Competition Organising Partners, regarding their promotion to competitors

- Develop more formalised agreements with colleges and Independent Training Providers (ITP) including specific diversity and inclusion targets

Involve competitors more actively across the WorldSkills UK ecosystem

Examples include:

- Create a diverse youth advisory board to support Skills Competitions going forward

- Showcase minority Skills Champions role models in roadshows and include them in visits with relevant minority student groups

- Increase the number of Skills Champions giving talks about the Skills

Competitions in colleges in place of WorldSkills UK staff, where possible

- Highlight examples of previous competitors who have gone on to add skills and prestige to their organisation

- Hire previous Skills Champions or other alumni to serve as key city or regional programme managers or ambassadors to support diversity and inclusion activities and wider Skills Competition strategy

Establish consistency across all partners through standardising Skills Competition processes

Examples include:

- Ensure bursary or other sponsorship support for all competitors

- Ensure consistency across all stakeholder groups (colleges, tutors, trainers, COPs etc) around financial and wellbeing support (e.g. create a 'playbook' for partners to work from)

- Establish across the board consistency about who is paid and who is not when it comes to COPs, tutors or trainers

- Establish and adopt standard operating principles for all stakeholders in the Skills Competitions (e.g. Principals, tutors, apprentice trainers, Judges, COPs) to encourage and support both broad and specific commitment to diversity and inclusion standards

- Develop a transparent toolkit about how to make these standard operating principles bespoke to context or roles (e.g. COPs)

- Develop a partnership platform for the WorldSkills UK ecosystem

- Review the role of ambassadors in helping to connect local areas under an umbrella group

Target diverse areas of the UK

Examples include:

- Research and map the colleges, Independent Training Providers (ITP), and employers in the larger cities that WorldSkills wishes to engage

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(e.g. 'cold spots'), and contact them personally to make a case for why they should get involved in WorldSkills UK Competitions

- Focus roadshows, events and heats in target cities
- Visit secondary schools as part of the WorldSkills UK roadshow to increase perceptions of technical skills, or work with local young ambassadors' networks to do so

Lead by example in driving Diversity and Inclusion internally and in the Skills Competitions

Examples include:

- Ensure diversity is represented throughout WorldSkills UK from the Board to staff and broader teams (e.g. recruit a young person/ previous Champion to be on the WorldSkills UK Board)
- Identify where Skills Competitions content or operations can be tweaked to enhance inclusivity (e.g. providing prayer rooms, etc.)
- Conduct an internal diversity audit across WorldSkills UK teams and identify and address the gaps

Provide signposting to quality diversity and inclusion training and support

Examples include:

- Provide quarterly or bi-annual diversity and inclusion training and induction (e.g. with Fearless Futures or other similar provider) to all stakeholders in the system and require attendance and commitment to participate in the competitions
- Across all stakeholder groups, upskill Training Managers on strategies for managing diverse teams so they can sustain them over time

Adapt the communications and marketing strategy

Examples include:

- Establish a campaign that speaks and appeals to young people from all

backgrounds, e.g. #iwill campaign for technical skills

- Form local and national media partnerships that target specific audiences
- Ensure that all social media channels (Instagram, Snapchat, YouTube) are targeting diverse groups of young people
- Create tailored and targeted communications and marketing materials that emphasise the positive impact participating in Skills Competitions will have on the personal and professional development of both students and apprentices
- Create an easily accessible and user-friendly Q&A communication channel dedicated to potential competitors so they can access additional information as needed
- Provide clear instructions on how to self-register on targeted communications and marketing materials
- Feature role models (including past competitors) as familiar faces in tailored marketing materials
- Implement a communications plan which focuses on identifying both good practice within the network and sharing examples from national or international good practice around diversity and inclusion
- Use the WorldSkills UK platform to highlight the capabilities and knowledge required to do certain skills, as well as the value of the technical skills sector
- Encourage participating colleges and Independent Training Providers (ITP) to engage in the roadshows
- Hold a session with stakeholders from the Champions programme to explore a new narrative around competitions
- Develop the WorldSkills UK brand as a diversity and inclusion Champion - this might include incorporating best practice into activity and promoting inclusion as part of the drive to acquire competitors

Appendix 4: WorldSkills UK Operating Model

WorldSkills UK is a registered charity with the objects of promoting vocational training and education in the UK and raising the standards of skills and technical knowledge. WorldSkills UK works to give all young people, regardless of their background, the best start in life and work. It is an accelerator for young people in the start-up phase of their careers, inspiring more young people to take up apprenticeships and technical education, championing their success, and accelerating their personal and professional development. WorldSkills UK meets its objectives through Skills Competitions, careers advice and mainstreaming international best practice.

The UK has participated in international Skills Competitions for over 65 years and whilst WorldSkills UK's predecessor organisations primarily focussed on managing the UK's Skills Competitions, at national and international levels, the remit changed after 2011 when the UK hosted the WorldSkills international competition and the wider value of Skills Competitions began to be recognised and realised. WorldSkills UK has led that change and driven an agenda with far more reach and impact and increased added value.

WorldSkills UK operates across the UK and receives core funding through an annual grant from Department for Education (via the Education and Skills Funding Agency). It uses this core to lever in significant funding in the form of cash sponsorship and exhibition sales as well as resources, materials and expertise that are provided "in kind".

WorldSkills UK has a small permanent staff cadre of c. 40 which is supported by a number of employees contracted for short term specialised and specific activities. This team provides a central core in key functional areas of marketing, business development, corporate services, education, competition management, operations and corporate affairs. To fulfil the above objectives the team works through an extensive and diverse network of other organisations and individuals. This network is vital to the effective delivery of WorldSkills UK's objectives and its sustainability.

This network includes a wide range of organisations, some of whom are provided with modest grants to support their contribution to the work of WorldSkills UK and many of whom give significant amounts of resources and expertise at their own expense. Key to the operation of Skills Competitions are c. 25 Competition Organising Partners which deliver the national competition cycle and around 40 Training Managers and Performance Coaches who prepare the Squad and Team for international competition. A wider network of employers, colleges and training providers register young people for Skills Competitions and /or contribute cash, materials, resources or time. Additionally, educators in schools, colleges and careers advice organisations and past competitors play a key role in supporting WorldSkills UK careers advice objectives.

Appendix 5: Tables

Appendix 6: Table of figures

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