

The next generation challenge

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Dealing with skills in short supply

Attracting people with industrial experience into further education colleges to become teachers, trainers or tutors within their vocational area is a challenge with a worthwhile purpose – to prepare the next generation for entering these industries. Moreover, as colleges are reporting hard-to-fill teaching/tutoring vacancies within industrial subjects, the recruitment of experienced candidates onto training courses, and for mentoring and support services, is especially important.

ORC International's research shows that more than a quarter of college respondents have had hard-to-fill vacancies in Health and Social Care within the last 12 months. Even less encouragingly, engineering was cited as an area with hard-to-fill vacancies by just over half of respondents (42 out of 82).

Pass on Your Skills* is a national initiative launched by Lifelong Learning UK (LLUK) to combat this problem by attracting candidates to become tutors within their vocational area, and by ensuring that further education staff have the required expertise and skills to successfully meet the needs of their vocational sector.

The skills in short supply

To inform LLUK's strategy, we sought to identify the industrial sectors of highest priority, as well as specific subject areas where FE Colleges had most difficulty recruiting suitably experienced staff. Apart from Health and Social Care, four other areas were identified as having the most hard-to-fill vacancies:

- Science and mathematics
- Hairdressing and beauty therapy
- Business administration, management and professional
- Hospitality, sports, travel and leisure

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Interestingly, 14 out of 82 colleges have not experienced any of these hard-to-fill vacancies in the past 12 months.

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Screaming for help

In respondents' experience, the main reasons for shortages within the FE sector were straightforward to identify (such as lower salaries within colleges compared to industries, and applicants lacking a teaching qualification and teaching skills) but resistant to change without a strong marketing campaign.

“There is a lack of literacy skills: none of those coming in have teaching qualifications in areas such as science, maths and computing.”

said one Personnel Manager.

Another commented:

“Some felt that new recruits from industry were quickly put off by large amounts of paperwork, for example. They misunderstand the nature of teaching and are shocked by the amount of paperwork in the job.”

A large minority (34 out of 82) of respondents said that they did not know what type of information and support would help address the colleges' skills shortages. An additional eight respondents said that “anything would be helpful” and they “needed more support in general”. These comments reinforce the need for external help from a campaign such as

Pass on Your Skills.

but help is on its way

This research will become a baseline for future tracking surveys to monitor change over the three-year lifetime of the campaign. It is anticipated that the recruitment challenges could soon be reduced, owing to a new array of specific recruitment channels and campaigns developed by LLUK.

* Pass on your Skills forms part of the Catalyst programme – one of a number of initiatives LLUK is delivering to support FE sector providers in England. LLUK has also facilitated the Workforce Strategy for Further Education (FE) in England 2007–2012, launched in January 2008, and is now developing an Implementation Plan that will outline key targets and deliverables for the sector. For more information about LLUK’s work please visit <http://www.lluk.org>