

Training Managers: Benefits from and barriers to WorldSkills UK participation

2015

Dr Stephanie Wilde,
SKOPE, University of Oxford

Dr Susan James,
SKOPE, University of Oxford

Professor Ken Mayhew,
SKOPE, University of Oxford

DuVE

Find a Future commissioned a suite of six projects, carried out by SKOPE, under the banner *Developing and understanding Vocational Excellence (DuVE)*. The purpose of these projects is to better understand how participation in the WorldSkills Competition, through WorldSkills UK, contributes to Find a Future's aim of promoting skills development and improving the skills base in the UK. Further information on the projects can be found at:

www.vocationalexcellence.education.ox.ac.uk

Research questions

Training managers (TMs) prepare competitors to compete in the WorldSkills competition (WSC) for Team UK. Each TM focuses on a specific skill area. This research addressed the following questions:

1. What are the key elements of the TM role, as perceived by the TMs?
2. What are the main benefits of participation in WorldSkills UK for TMs?
3. What are the main barriers and difficulties faced by TMs?
4. What are the benefits from and barriers to participation for colleges and employers, as perceived by the TMs?

Participants

We conducted semi-structured interviews with 36 of the 38 TMs in post for the two-year training cycle preparing competitors for WorldSkills São Paulo, Brazil 2015. The sample therefore included almost all the skill areas represented by the UK.

The majority of TMs for this cycle were male (30 out of 36) and all were white British/Irish. Thirteen were full-time lecturers in further education (FE), nine were self-employed, nine are retired, and five were industry-employed.

The TMs interviewed had been in the role for various periods of time: 15 had taken up the post between 2005 and

Abstract

This Research Brief summarises a study to understand the role Training Managers (TMs) play in WorldSkills training, preparation and competitions. It discusses benefits and barriers to participation in WorldSkills UK from the TMs' perspective and provides recommendations for supporting TMs.

2010, for example, and 15 began the role between 2011 and 2014.

How do the TMs perceive their role?

The TM role is complex and challenging. Training the competitors is the main focus, as well as attending competitions. In addition, TMs also perform a range of organisational and administrative tasks, liaise with colleges and employers on behalf of competitors, participate in technical conferences run by Find a Future as preparation for participation in competitions, and organise external training and specialist equipment for their competitors.

The role is unremunerated, although a daily rate of £150 may be applied for in certain circumstances and expenses are reimbursed.

Benefits for Training Managers

Benefits identified by the TMs included professional benefits, such as maintaining cutting-edge skills and knowledge:

For me it's keeping on top of my skills area, skills sets, keeping current, staying current.

The TMs also mentioned networking with experts in their field and other TMs in other skill areas as professional benefits:

I feel my benefits are, it widened my knowledge skills. I'm working with the other Training Managers, you know, that has been fantastic, because I understand the intricacies of their skills as well.

Personal benefits mentioned by TMs in the study included enjoying the 'buzz' of competition:

To see youngsters go through this process is a massive buzz. For anybody that's involved, I'd be very surprised if they don't get an adrenaline rush to see these youngsters doing well and when you see ceremonies and people getting medals, it's fantastic.

Pride in representing their country is also a benefit and a motivating factor for TMs:

I'm never going to be a David Beckham, you know, I'm not going to play for England at football or cricket or anything like that, but I actually feel very honoured and very proud when I'm representing the country.

Sharing the journey of the competitors is another key personal benefit for the TMs:

The benefit for me is to see the competitor get the outcome at the end, that's the ultimate, that's the payback for me.

The majority of TMs also felt a connection to their competitors and their careers beyond the WorldSkills cycle, following their progress and supporting them. Almost all the TMs indicated that they felt a great sense of privilege to be working with 'the best in the country'. This allowed them to use more complex teaching approaches and skills than might be possible in their work at college or in industry. In addition, they also brought back enhanced skills and training knowledge to their respective working contexts:

I think the biggest benefits for me are what I'm able to bring back to my own teaching practices and share around here.

Our respondents also reported the positive impact of the international and UK peer group network of TMs:

I use the analogy of a WorldSkills family, but you do, you make friends, you make acquaintances around the globe; the fellow training managers, we are extremely close.

Barriers and difficulties encountered by training managers

One barrier mentioned by the TMs was the intensity of the time commitment. Officially this is 90 days across the two-year cycle, including around 20 days for the WSC in Brazil in August 2015, as well as four days at the Skills Show:

It's the time commitment that's the number one issue, trying to find that time around the day job which is also a full-time job.

TMs who were FE lecturers (just over one third of the 36 interviewed) noted difficulties regarding the time spent away from college, such as the need for replacement teaching and the need to make up work accumulated during the time spent away. In addition, TMs mentioned dissatisfaction with financial issues, particularly reimbursements:

I mean it is meant to be a voluntary role, which the majority of it is. But it costs me money and my major problem is that we don't always get paid our expenses very quickly.

Further, some TMs also commented that they felt they had been left to their own devices to come to terms with their new post and what it involved:

I'm surprised that for new training managers they don't have, like, an induction programme.

This situation sometimes made dealing with all the requirements of the TM role extremely challenging, described by one TM as 'flying in the dark'. Many reflected on how they would hand over to a new TM in due course:

I'd like to hand it over properly, to show them the nuts and bolts of the job, this is how you go through the processes, but sort of more so with the training, it's developing the training plans.

In addition, the perceived lack of recognition of the work they do arose in many interviews.

The TMs indicated that these barriers and difficulties could compromise the effectiveness of their work, their professional identity and their willingness to extend their commitment to future competitions.

Benefits and barriers for colleges and employers

Colleges and employers with a member of staff or a student participating in WorldSkills UK as a TM or competitor make an important contribution to the UK commitment to international skills competitions by allowing their staff members and students the time required to take part in the training, technical conferences and competitions.

TMs perceived both benefits and barriers to college and employer participation. Public relations benefits included: information in company brochures and college prospectuses about the WorldSkills UK participation of TMs and competitors, and enhanced networking with other participating colleges, employers and industry partners, nationally and internationally.

The TMs working in FE as full-time lecturers all indicated that their additional experience and learning from WorldSkills participation benefitted the wider college through knowledge exchange with colleagues and enriched learning opportunities for students:

That filters through to others because I'm leading other lecturers, so the other lecturers are getting the benefit of the training that I receive because I glean a lot from WorldSkills in the further training that I give the competitors.

TMs also pointed out that their presence in colleges and companies can encourage participation in WorldSkills:

It benefits this college particularly, maybe it's by chance or because I'm the lecturer here, in that we have had WorldSkills competitor after WorldSkills competitor and for the last four cycles, there's been somebody from this college involved.

TMs indicated a need for more effective media and public relations work to inform employers and FE staff at all levels about the potential benefits of getting involved in competitions and WorldSkills UK:

I think the key is to get more colleges involved. There seems to be almost like a 'premier league' of colleges that know about WorldSkills, and all of our competitors [for a particular skill area] come from those three or four colleges. None of the other colleges really know about it.

TMs also described the difficulties of outlining to employers what WorldSkills is, who is involved and how the organisation is structured, because of frequent organisational changes. Some thought this might have an effect on the willingness of employers

to commit their staff time to WorldSkills. One TM described a conversation with an employer, to persuade them to get involved:

I was, like, 'what are we called now?' So that was Skill Funding Agency and that one is WorldSkills UK and that one is Find a Future. I just kind of said, 'look at the end of the day we can't do it without the employers'.

The time commitment and time away from their primary workplace were the main issues mentioned by the TMs as barriers to participation by colleges and employers.

Overall, this study indicates that the TMs play a central role in the competition work of WorldSkills UK, which is perhaps not always fully acknowledged officially or in the wider context.

Selected recommendations

Our recommendations include:

- Designing a comprehensive induction programme for new TMs, ideally including an official handover period from the previous TM.
- Further investigating the TM workload and share the time-table for WorldSkills activities in good time so that TMs can negotiate time away from their work with their employers and colleagues, and also on behalf of their competitors.
- Ensuring expenses incurred by TMs are reimbursed within a reasonable period of time, and ideally within one month.
- Enhancing the communication and rapport between TMs and the Find a Future administrative staff.
- Improving and expanding the information on the relevant website, with specific content geared to colleges and employers about WorldSkills. For example, at present there is no information about how FE colleges or employers might become involved or what the benefits of that involvement might be.

The full report for this project is available at:

<http://vocationalexcellence.education.ox.ac.uk/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2015/06/Project-6-Training-Managers-Benefits-from-and-barriers-to-WorldSkills-UK-participation.pdf>