

The future of retail skills – proposition for working group

1. Background

At its outset the Retail Sector Council has a stated aim to grow skills through a sector push on high-value training to equip the sector with a future proofed workforce. The skills workstream provides an opportunity to consider how the sector, in partnership with government and other stakeholders, respond to the significant challenges and opportunities we face as the pace of change quickens and world of work evolves.

This document proposes the Retail Sector Council develops a robust evidence base on which to develop realistic, deliverable and measurable proposals that increase the skills of the workforce across the whole sector - from bricks and mortar, online to SMEs. While the role of government is vital to the health of our sector, the proposals will not be a shopping list of government action, rather they will aim to develop an industry-led cohesive response in partnership with government and other key stakeholders.

The proposals will - through a combination of research, stakeholder engagement and scenario planning – result in a series of recommendations that business, academia and government can take forward collectively and practically to shape the future of retail employment. It is further proposed that the recommendations remain a live document with practical recommendations that will be regularly monitored and enhanced by the Retail Sector Council after they are launched.

2. Methodology

It is proposed that the working group takes this work forward in four phases. In the initial phase, it is important to demonstrate a robust evidence base or take steps to develop an evidence base where gaps exist. To achieve this, the working group will draw on existing research and work undertaken in recent years by the likes of UKCES, the BRC and DFE, and seek to define the current and future landscape of retail - and the wider employment and skills context across the UK. This process will identify information gaps and propose how these can be addressed through the development of the proposals.

In the second phase, we will pose a number of strategic questions on the challenges and opportunities across the sector and the role of each stakeholder in meeting them. We will engage as widely as possible on these questions and use this process to identify the many good things we already do, to seek views on how we meet the challenges and opportunities that we face, and explore new ideas to drive skills development in retail. It is proposed that this information is gathered through a series of cross-sector focus groups, interviews with key stakeholders and an online consultation process.

The third phase will seek to bring the initial research and wider engagement together into a series of recommendations that will form the basis of the proposals/recommendations from the group. This phase will also provide an opportunity for the Retail Sector Council to review the recommendations before final publication in September 2019.

In the final phase, it is proposed the recommendations launch is followed by a series of interactive dissemination and consultation events, which will allow the Retail Sector Council to finesse and finalise the paper. These events will also provide an opportunity to promote our findings to the widest audience possible - seeking to build a coalition of support to help implement and deliver the recommendations.

3. Key questions and areas for consideration

- Are there any key indicators and insights that currently do not exist which would support the development of skills in retail?
- Is retail's engagement with learning providers and other academic institutions strategic enough? How can we ensure it is fit for the future and do you have any examples of partnerships that work well?
- What steps does the sector need to take to identify future needs and increase the attractiveness in retail as a career? Do you have any examples?
- What are the current barriers retailers' face which stop them embracing online retail and/or other advancements in tech?
- What skills do retailers think the sector will need in 5-10 years?
- What can the sector do to ensure skills are future proofed to maximise opportunities for business and employees? Do you have any examples?
- What medium term legislative proposals would help the development of skills across the retail sector (and more widely if appropriate)?
- What non-legislative proposals can be developed in partnership between government and the sector to ensure that skills are enhanced?
- How should skills development in retail interact with the development of other government initiatives such as apprenticeships and the national retraining scheme?
- How do we ensure that skills are transferable between sub-sectors of retail - bricks and mortar, online and SMEs? Do you have any examples?
- How should we measure and monitor the impact of the recommendations in this report?

4. Timeline

Date	Activity
26 February 2019	Scope agreed by Retail Sector Council
March 2019	Initial research phase
April - July 2019	External engagement/consultation period
July - August 2019	Consideration of responses, development of practical recommendations and review by Retail Sector Council
September 2019	Publication launch
September – December 2019	Dissemination events
January 2020	Ongoing review by Retail Sector Council

5. FAQs

Q: Why does this work matter?

A: There is an enormous amount of debate and discussion (some might say grumbling) from business leaders and others about the skills “crises” but much less precision about exactly what these skill gaps are, let alone how best to address them. The intent here is to create a clear business-led, evidence-based perspective with as much precision on what skills are needed, where the gaps are today and into the future, and what we should all be doing to address this challenge.

Q: Why will this work be better able to do this than any other?

A: Crucially this will be business led and, leveraging the wide network of the Sector Council, informed by the views and experiences of senior leaders (from CEO down) and HR professionals from the broadest range of businesses both large and small across the sector.

Q: Won't your recommendations just be a laundry list of requests for help from Government?

A: No. We believe the vast majority of the actions needed will lie with and should be owned by business, although where we believe there are enabling or facilitating actions that Government and others can take and we will not hesitate to call these out.

Q: What help do you need to complete this work?

A: We will be reaching out over the coming weeks to a wide range of businesses seeking views and would very much welcome Council members' support in both sharing your own views and facilitating introductions to others within your networks.

6. Next steps

Following feedback and agreement from the Retail Sector Council, it is suggested that further discussions take place with BEIS officials to determine level of support and potential resource to develop this proposal.