



International Benchmarking

Final Report and Evaluation

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INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

The UK has a strong and stable economical position with world leading employment rates but this trend is not reflected in our nation's productivity. More than one third of adults in the UK do not have a basic school-leaving qualification and almost half of adults are not functionally numerate and one sixth are not functionally literate. Improving the UK's skills levels can help address this problem.

As business and administration skills are the most central skills to possess regardless of the occupation or the sector the CfA is assessing, reviewing and updating its standards on a regular basis. This benchmarking activity has implications for national occupation standards (NOS) in the UK. If the UK is to compete effectively with the rest of world, NOS need to be aligned with the best international standards. Benchmarking UK standards with international standards ensures that UK standards are quality checked and enable administrators to be mobile in the international job market.

A growing global market economy and increased competition led Australia and the UK to introduce regulated business & administration standards with the intention to increase the level of vocational skills in their work force during the 1990's.

Australian standards are very similar to UK standards with the exception of some topics which are not covered in the same depth. In Australia, the range statements are not mandatory which means that there is flexibility in interpreting the evidence according to the workplace and the candidate and the underpinning skills are mentioned with regard to literacy, communication, numeracy and interpersonal skills. This is a useful feature for employers to see how by undertaking the unit, the administrator can obtain very specific skills which will benefit their organisation.

In contrast to Australia and the UK Germany has a long tradition of vocational training, which was implemented and legislated during the 1960's. It is probably best known as the dual training system, because training takes place in two locations, the college and at the workplace.

Approximately 75% of young people in Germany access an apprenticeship with the highest uptake in Business & Administration. Reasons for this success are manifold: vocational training has a high status and the majority of young people automatically follow the customary route from school into an apprenticeship. The vocational training system has always been underpinned by one common national framework and one national exam structure. Standards and frameworks are legislated and most employers themselves have trained under the same system and understand its structure. Vocational education and training is very much part of the countries socio-economic fabric and valued by everyone.

1.2 Aims and Objectives

The aim of this project is to compare the standard of business and administration skills and competences in Australia and Germany with those in the UK and plug the gaps, which were identified during the benchmarking process.

The project was divided into three stages. The first section focused on:

- gathering evidence from desk research and interviews on business and administration standards in Australia
- looking at training and development schemes in business and administration in Germany
- analysing German documents and produce key findings
- identifying best employment practices for business and administration staff in high performing national and global organisations with UK offices

The second part of the project involved the actual process of benchmarking German, Australian and organisational business and administration standards to UK standards. This required designing a benchmarking tool that would map across all standards and highlight those sections, which are not currently covered by UK standards.

For the final milestone the CfA commissioned a market research company to conduct a consultation with high performing national and global organisations across Britain. Employers were invited to give their opinion on the value in aligning UK standards with international standards and whether they considered these changes to the current UK standards as an effective method in closing the skills gap.

2. METHODOLOGY

The following methodology was employed to take forward the following aspects of the project:

2.1 Desk Research

The CfA carried out extensive desk research and interviews with a number of socio-economic partners. This included interviews and meetings with national and global high performing organisations and further education institutions in the UK, Australia and Germany.

Australia:

Australia is ranked 6th in the world for its economic literacy and is one of the top countries globally for the availability of skilled labour, IT professionals, finance skills and qualified engineers.

This skills base is underpinned by a tertiary education system that places Australia in the top four countries in the world in meeting the needs of a competitive economy. Australia has a total population of 20,638,772 with just under 50% of its population in employment (10,085,000).

Between 2003-04, the Managers and Administrators occupational groups recorded the highest growth in apprentices and trainees in training of 32.8%.

In Australia, the CfA consulted with 25 employer organisations and various sources of desk research on the Australian education system, the Australian workforce and the Australian business and administration standards and training packages. Sources used were:

- www.justsecretarialjobs.com.au
- National Centre for Vocational Education Research, Adelaide
- Aspire Training Ltd

- Innovation & Business Skills Australia Ltd
- Australian Bureau of Statistics
- Department of Education, Science and Training (DEST) – Australian Government

Australia

- Similar education system to the UK (vocational and academic)
- 6 clear levels from age 6 to 21 and over
- Level descriptors match UK versions
- Similar design of standards (but with range and scope)
- Large number of units to choose from at each level
- 23 different types of imported unit
- Similar content to UK standards
- 2nd most popular apprenticeship is Administration
- Similar job roles as UK at levels 2, 3 and 4
- Employer best practise fits well with Australian standards

Germany:

The desk research for Germany was followed up by meetings and interviews with the Chamber of Commerce in Frankfurt, which produced the following documents:

- Die Reform der Beruflichen Bildung 2005/ Reforms in vocational training and education 2005:
- http://www.bmbf.de/pub/die_reform_beruflichen_bildung.pdf
- Germany's Tradition for Work Based Learning: The Dual System in Progress
<http://www.bmbf.de/de/4237.php>
- Das Berufliche Bildungsgesetz 2005/The Vocational Training Act 2005
- [Vocational Training Act 2005](#)
- Nationaler Pakt für Ausbildung und Fachkräftenachwuchs in Deutschland/ The National Training Pact
- <http://www.dihk.de/pakt/intro/index.html>
- Standards and Frameworks:
 - Office Administrator
 - Administrator for Office Communications*
 - Public Administrator

* Administration for Office Communications has emerged as the most relevant qualification for business and administration training. Public administration is too specialised and has a very low up-take whereas the skills base for office administration is too broad. Therefore, the roles of Office Administration and Public Administration are planned to be incorporated into Office Communications. This means there will only be one business and administration qualification instead of the previous three.

Steering Group Meetings

The CfA established a number of Steering Groups for this project with representation from training providers, Awarding Bodies and employers.

Steering Groups

England – A Steering Group was held in London on the 9th November 2006. Minutes are attached as appendix 4.

Northern Ireland – A Steering Group was held in Belfast on the 7th November 2006. Minutes are attached as appendix 5.

Scotland – A Steering Group was held in Glasgow on the 1st November 2006. Minutes are attached as appendix 6.

Wales – A Steering Group was held in Cardiff on the 2nd November 2006. Minutes are attached as appendix 7.

3. FINDINGS

This project has provided an opportunity to review the current UK Business & Administration standards and how the UK compares with international standards.

A number of areas were highlighted, which feature strongly in the Australian and German standards but are not currently included in the UK standards.

Australia

The Australian findings provide an idea of how a large menu of standards for administrators can provide a truly tailored approach to training packages and create a mobile administration workforce both nationally and internationally.

The UK standards are similar but some topics are not covered in the same depth. In Australia, the range statements are not mandatory which means that there is flexibility in interpreting the evidence according to the workplace and the candidate. This is the reasoning behind why the UK standards now do not contain range. In the Australian standards, underpinning skills are mentioned with regard to literacy, communication, numeracy and interpersonal skills. This is a useful feature for employers to see how by undertaking the unit, the administrator can obtain very specific skills which will benefit their organisation.

Germany

Germany's dual system of vocational training ensures that a balance between learning and training delivers highly skilled people into the labour market. The German findings provide an idea of how legislated standards offer quality assurance within an apprenticeship framework which in turn creates a highly skilled and trained administrative workforce.

The German Business & Administration standards have a strong emphasis on theoretical knowledge, e.g. Performance management (performance building- and realisation): Process of performance building and legal responsibilities, productivity depending on market conditions and forecasting as well as a second foreign language. The core modules of the Business & Administration framework are:

Finance and Statistics

- Explain the necessity of a constant monitoring the efficiency and performance of your organisation
- contribute to administrative controlling
- Explain your organisations accounts system as the tool for administrative controlling and explain the
- structure of the accounts system
- Illustrate the cost structure of your organisation
- Illustrate cost and turnover of your organisation
- Assist with the organisations reporting system
- Contribute to preventing errors during the gathering, processing and evaluation of information

Tasks in specialised accounting

- provide, check and process supporting documentation
- Check invoices; implement appropriate measures when detecting deviations
- Allocate invoices to relevant account
- Observe payment of invoices considering terms of payment
- Check departmental costs and stock

Statistics

- Explain the range of uses of statistics in your organisation
- Collate, process and display data for the preparation of statistics
- analyse statistics and evaluate the results

Human Resources

- 12 Basics of HR
- Observe and process important employment- and social legislations as well as tariff regulations
- Observe your obligation for co-operation with the current [work] constitution bodies
- Illustrate independent and tariff regulated taxes relating to the period of training
- Illustrate aspects of staff requirement and recruitment processes
- Give examples to measures of staff planning and development of individual staff in your organisation
- Illustrate targets and processes of staff assessments
- Explain components of the total salary and calculate the net amount
- Observe data protection regulations when processing employee records

Specific Departmental HR Tasks

- Explain the tasks and procedures of departmental
- personnel processes within HR
- Process working hours, absences, holiday and sickness periods
- Manage accident records
- Process additional employment records
- Manage personnel statistics
- Process tasks relating to changes in personnel

Environmental Protection

- Ventilation, light, colour, space, noise etc.
- The affects of your immediate surroundings e.g. your work station on your performance

One foreign business language

- Language modules covering daily verbal communications, e.g. telephone and correspondence with focus on Business & Administration language
- Teaching language modules including cultural awareness of the relevant country
- [Exchange programmes between UK and German businesses](#)

The UK findings provide an idea of how the size of the organisation can determine the administration procedures and therefore the job role of an administrator which in turn affects the suitability of training and qualifications.

However, it appeared that many UK businesses are not aware that Business & Administration standards exist. Regular comments were: "I know nothing about these standards or the training/education behind them. I had absolutely no idea what the 'Levels' mean. Therefore it was very difficult for me to know what is appropriate to Level 4 rather than Level 2". "It's important that employers are

given an idea of the benefits to them and their businesses of these standards - and therefore, the value of spending some time to provide feedback.

Consultation

Awaiting results from market research due on the 20th December.

The benchmarking tables and the consultation evaluation are attached at Appendix 8 and 9

4. RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the project outcomes, the CfA recommends the following changes:

- The following modules to be adapted to UK employer needs and included in UK Business & Administration standards
 - Finance and Statistics (statistics are not currently covered in the NOS directory)
 - Basics to Human Resources
 - Environmental protection and sustainability
 - One foreign business language
- Responding to employers comments and deliver UK wide events/ road shows introducing Business & Administration standards to employers
- Benchmarking UK standards to Canadian, New Zealand and Norwegian standards to determine the wider position of UK standards in the world
- Introduction of a foreign business focused language