



English summary
of Fafo-rapport 2020:30

Relevance in vocational education and training

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Development and analysis of a skilled worker survey and an employer survey

A key objective of the vocational training system is to ensure that those who complete the training for a craft or journeyman's certificate or as a skilled worker possess competencies that are relevant for Norwegian industry. Relevance for industry is therefore also an important quality criterion. This is the main report from the Skilled Workers Project, which was undertaken by Fafo and the Nordic Institute for Studies in Innovation, Research and Education (NIFU) in the period 2017–2020 and commissioned by the Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training. We have previously published a summary of preliminary results from the project (Andersen, Skålholt & Tønder, 2019).

The project includes development and analysis of two surveys of skilled workers and employers respectively. The assignment has involved developing and pilot testing a technical solution and conducting the surveys, as well as analysing data from four training programmes: building and construction; health, childhood and youth services; technical and industrial production; and restaurant and food processing.

The main objective of the two studies was to investigate the relevance of vocational training to industry, seen from the perspectives of the skilled workers and the employers respectively. Our application of the concept of 'relevance' with regard to vocational training is based on two issues. First, we investigate the extent to which the content of the training is commensurate with the competence requirements of the job. Second, we investigate the extent to which a craft certificate is a preferred qualification in the line of work in question.

The skilled workers survey was undertaken among persons who had completed and passed one of the four vocational training programmes. The study was conducted in two rounds (but not as a panel study) for each training programme. The surveys in the health, childhood and youth services programme and the building and construction programme were undertaken in the autumn of 2018 and the autumn of 2019. The surveys in the technical and industrial production programme and the restaurant and food processing programme were undertaken in January 2020 and September-October 2020. The surveys were conducted online, and invitations to participate with a link to the questionnaire were distributed by text message. The sample of skilled workers was drawn from the VIGO registry.

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The population of training establishments that had at least one apprentice from one of the selected training programmes during the last five years formed the starting point for identifying relevant businesses. Among the establishments in the health, childhood and youth sector, we chose those that had employed either healthcare workers or childhood and youth welfare workers.

The findings show that skilled workers from all four training programmes have a high employment rate. At least two out of three are employed shortly after earning their craft certificate, and in the building and construction industry approximately eight out of ten are employed. There are clear indications that most of the skilled workers are in relevant employment. This impression is confirmed by the employers, a large majority of whom report that a craft certificate is a major factor when recruiting new staff.

The vast majority of the skilled workers report that they use the technical expertise acquired in the training programme in their current job either to a very great or a great extent. The majority also feel that the training has provided them with a good basis for performing their current job. The responses to these questions show that the majority of the skilled workers in all four training programmes consider there to be a high degree of correspondence between the content of their training and the competence requirements in the job they have found after completing the training programme. The employers also generally agree that a craft certificate is highly valued in recruitment processes. The employers also tend to report that the content of the training programmes matches their needs. We can nevertheless see that the building and construction enterprises and enterprises that recruit personnel from the technical and industrial production programme to a lesser extent report a good match with their needs, when compared to employers in the restaurant and food processing industry and the health, childhood and youth services sector.

It varies greatly whether a craft certificate is a preferred qualification in the line of work that skilled workers take up. We can see, for example, that there is variable access to permanent jobs and full-time work. In the construction industry and the technical and industrial production sector, approximately nine out of ten skilled workers report to be permanently employed in full-time positions. In the restaurant and food processing sector, this applies to approximately two out of three, while in the health, childhood and youth services only around one in three are permanently employed full time. This concurs with findings in a number of previous studies. Skilled workers from the health, childhood and youth programme enter a section of the labour market where part-time work is common. For many employees in this sector, part-time work is a voluntary choice. However, for young people who are at an early stage in their career, it is reasonable to assume that a majority would prefer permanent employment and full-time work if given the choice. In light of the fact that the skilled workers' competencies are

in great demand, we may conclude that this is due to structural conditions in the labour market as opposed to the content of the training.

The different positions of the crafts also emerge in questions that pertain to continuing education or plans for the future. More than half of the skilled workers in the health, childhood and youth sector report intentions to enrol in higher education within the next five years. This is a considerably higher proportion than in the three other training programmes. In the building and construction sector it will be even more relevant to undertake tertiary vocational training, and approximately one in every five report intentions to take a master certificate. This is continuing education that builds on the craft certificate, in contrast to higher education in a university or college. The observation that a large proportion of the skilled workers in the health, childhood and youth services sector aim for higher education can be seen as an adaptation to a labour market where the craft certificate is seen as providing few advantages in the competition for a permanent position, full-time work or prospects for advancement. Skilled workers from the building and construction and the technical and industrial production programmes enter parts of the industry that have elements of a vocationally based labour market, where a craft certificate provides a clear advantage when compared to other occupations, and where clear career pathways have been established for skilled workers. This is less prominent in the health, childhood and youth sector. In the restaurant and food processing industry, we can also see a tendency for some of the skilled workers to seek ways out of their occupation. Here too, a considerable proportion report that they plan to take higher education within the next five years. Just over half of these envision taking an education in another profession. In other words, the prospects for vocational development in the present occupation tend to be deemed as limited here as well. Figures on applications to the restaurant and food processing programme at the upper secondary level also reveal a clear decline in enrolment during recent years. This may indicate that a career in the restaurant and food processing sector is gradually losing its appeal among young people.

The majority of the employers in all four sectors agree that the proportion of skilled workers in the workforce will either increase or remain at the current level. However, a considerable proportion believe that in the years to come, there will be fewer employees with a craft certificate. This proportion is highest in the restaurant and food processing sector. Here, nearly half of the respondents believe that the proportion of employees with a craft certificate will be lower in the years to come.

If the competencies of newly educated people are insufficiently put to use, or if young people fail to enrol in these training programmes, shortfalls in relevant skills may result. Moreover, we can see that employers in the health, childhood and youth services and restaurant and food processing sectors make extensive

use of forms of training and recruitment other than vocational training programmes.

The recommendations from the report with regard to conducting future skilled workers and employers surveys include the following:

- A shorter time span after the craft examination. There is reason to assume that the willingness to respond declines, the more time that has passed after the completion of training.
- Conduct two full rounds between each reporting from the skilled workers survey to enable the pooling of responses and improve the basis for analysis.
- Conduct future employers surveys as email-based surveys to learning establishments that have been training apprentices in the two years preceding the survey.

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