



# **Northern Ireland** Voluntary and Community Sector Skills Survey 2008

Understanding skills development across  
the voluntary and community sector in  
Northern Ireland

**Summary Report**

The Northern Ireland Voluntary and Community Sector Skills Survey 2008 provides a comprehensive view of recruitment issues, skills gaps and skills shortages, training provision and future skills needs. The research has also shown how different Sector Skills Councils (SSCs) relate to the voluntary and community sector. This research was funded by the Sectoral Development Branch in the Department for Employment and Learning (DEL). The research which was carried out by NICVA was developed in conjunction with nine SSC's, each of which played an integral part in the development of the project. The steering group for this research was made up of representatives from each of the nine SSCs listed below.

Skills for Justice (SfJ)	Asset Skills (AS)
Skills for Health (SfH)	LANTRA
Skills Active (SA)	Lifelong Learning UK (LLUK)
Skills for Care and Development (SCD)	Creative and Cultural Skills (CCS)
Skillsmart Retail (SR)	

The full report is available to download from [www.skillsforjustice.com](http://www.skillsforjustice.com)

## Aims and objectives

The main aim of this research was to explore and examine the nature, scope and impact of skills shortages and skills gaps in the paid workforce of the voluntary and community sector in Northern Ireland. The rationale for the collation of labour market information (LMI) on the voluntary and community sector lies in the complexity of the sector's relationship with different SSCs. Research carried out by Skills for Justice in 2006 showed that the majority of voluntary and community organisations carried out a range of work which fell within the footprint of at least two SSCs, and sometimes considerably more. This research sought to examine:

- Employers' experiences of hard to fill vacancies and the reasons for this.
- Employers' views on recruitment over the next three years.
- How many employers have skills gaps in their workforces, the types of functions and skills affected, the causes of these gaps, any actions taken to overcome them and the impact these gaps have.
- The extent to which organisations have a formal training plan and training budget.
- The size and scope of SSC's footprints in the voluntary and community sector.

The research also aimed to collect data in a number of key areas that was in accordance with the Northern Ireland specific strategic objectives for SSCs. The research examined four key areas:

- Leadership and Management
- Workforce skills
- Vocational Training Programmes
- Careers

## Methodology

Attempting to design a research project that on one hand captures the current and future skills needs of a diverse collection of voluntary and community organisations and on the other describes the relationship that exists with SSCs is a complex and difficult task. To achieve this, a questionnaire was developed which had a core set of questions along with a series of SSC specific modules which directly related to the footprints of each of the SSCs. The core set of questions examined generic recruitment issues, skills gaps, resources for training and future skills needs. For each of the SSCs an individual set of questions (or modules) were developed. Perhaps the most important aspect of the project design was to ensure that each of the SSCs had the opportunity to gather specific data that helped formulate Sector Skills Agreements and to assess the relationship with other SSCs and the overall voluntary and community sector.

A sample of 4,419 voluntary and community organisations were drawn from the NICVA database. The fieldwork consisted of 500 computer-aided telephone interviews (CATI) which were completed during March 2007. In order to achieve the 500 successful interviews, over 2,600 completed calls were made to organisations in the voluntary and community, thus representing a strike rate of one in six. The telephone interviews were conducted by Customer and Marketing Surveys ([www.cmsurveys.com](http://www.cmsurveys.com)).

## Definitions

Throughout the research a number of definitions were used to describe skills and the nature of organisations included in this survey.

- **Skills shortages** relate to those hard to fill vacancies which are the result of either a lack of required basic or specialist skills, qualifications or experience in the applicants.
- **Skills gaps** exist where employers report having employees who are not fully proficient at their job.

Organisations were classified in relation to the number of employees they have.

- Small organisations (1-4 employees)
- Medium organisations (5-24 employees)
- Large organisations (25 plus employees)

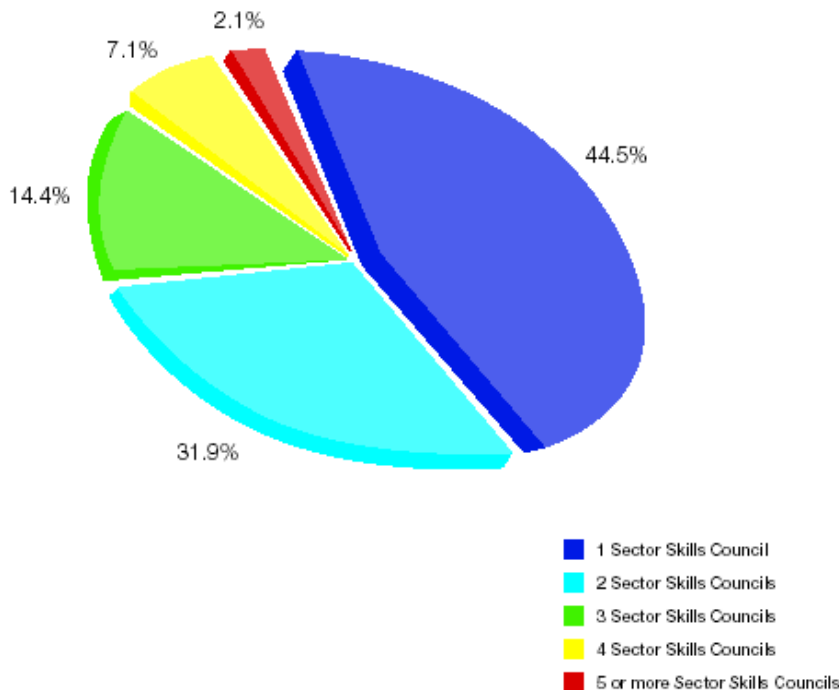
## Key findings

*State of the Sector IV* (NICVA, 2005) estimated there were 28,932 individuals employed in the voluntary and community sector, which represents 4.4% of the total Northern Ireland workforce. This research found that of the 5,951 posts analysed, 71% were held by females, 38% were part-time in nature, 1.6% were held by individuals from a black or minority ethnic background and 22% of the workforce was aged over 50 years old.

Respondents were asked to consider the main role of each paid employee, ie the one that they spend the most time doing. The most common function is that of administrator with 61.9% of organisations stating they had an individual(s) fulfilling this role. Management functions such as project manager (51.1%), function head (37.8%) and chief executive/director (36.8%) make up the next three most common functions overall.

This research found that in small organisations with 1-4 employees only 18.4% reported having a chief executive/director. This figure increases to 77.6% for large organisations which have 25 or more employees. Equally, the smaller the organisation the likelihood of it having paid staff fulfilling generic functions such as finance, human resources, IT support, marketing and fundraising increases. As organisations increase from being small employers to medium and large employers there is a steady increase in the number of paid employees who fulfil these generic functions. This analysis perhaps demonstrates the need for paid employees in smaller organisations to be skilled in many areas with the ability to multi-task and be flexible enough to adapt to changing functions.

### Percentage of organisations falling within the footprints of different SSCs



SSCs are independent, employer led organisations each with a ‘footprint’ covering a particular industrial sector. It was decided that since the voluntary and community sector works across a large number of areas, the skills needs of the sector would be met by the SSCs covering the relevant sector. Therefore there is no one SSC for the voluntary and community sector.

Over half of organisations (55.5%) fall within the footprints of two or more SSCs. Only 2.3% of organisations included in this survey did not fall within the footprint of any of the SSCs.

The SSC which has the largest footprint in the voluntary and community sector in Northern Ireland is Life Long Learning UK (LLUK) which accounts for almost half (47.7%) of all the organisations included in this survey. The Skills for Care and Development (SCD) footprint accounts for 42.1% of all the paid employees included in this research.

### Number of organisations and paid staff by SSC

	Total organisations	% of total organisations	Total staff	% of total staff
Lifelong Learning UK	244	47.7	1,148	19.3
Skills for Care and Development	170	33.2	2,506	42.1
Skills Active	129	25.2	624	10.5
Skills for Justice	122	23.8	918	15.4
Skills for Health	45	8.8	699	11.7
Creative and Cultural Skills	43	8.6	238	3.9
LANTRA	41	8.2	-	-
Asset Skills	35	6.8	460	7.7
Skillsmart Retail	26	5.0	115	1.9
None	12	2.3		
<b>Total</b>	<b>511</b>		<b>5,951</b>	

Base: 511 (totals exceed 511 as organisation could select multiple sector skills councils. Total responses 825)

The research found a number of overlaps between SSCs that have a significant footprint in the voluntary and community sector. Reading from left to right in the table below, 44.4% of organisations that are in the Skills for Health footprint are also in the Skills for Justice footprint. 62.2% of organisations in the Skills for Health footprint also appear in the Skills for Care and Development footprint. Only 2.3% of organisations included in this survey did not fall within the footprint of any of the SSCs.

## Footprints of SCCs

	SfJ	SCD	SR	CCS	SfH	SA	AS	LLUK	LANTRA
SfJ		42.6	4.1	6.6	16.4	27.0	12.3	59.8	9.0
SCD	30.6		5.3	3.5	16.5	23.5	10.6	38.2	5.9
SR	19.2	34.6		19.2	23.1	23.1	0.0	30.8	15.4
CCS	18.6	14.0	11.6		2.3	25.6	0.0	44.2	4.7
SfH	44.4	62.2	13.3	2.2		20.0	6.7	42.2	2.2
SA	25.6	31.0	4.7	8.5	7.0		4.7	55.0	11.6
AS	42.9	51.4	0.0	0.0	8.6	17.1		37.1	5.7
LLUK	29.3	34.7	3.3	7.8	7.8	29.0	5.3		8.2
LANTRA	26.8	24.4	9.8	4.9	2.4	36.6	4.9	48.8	

### Key

50% plus  40-49%  30-39%  20-29%  10-19%  0-9%

Base: 500 (totals exceed 100% as organisations can fall into the footprint of more than one SSC)

## Recruitment

Recruitment is difficult for organisations and for those organisations which have experienced difficulties, a low skills base amongst applicants is a concern. Equally the impact of the nature of the funding environment in the voluntary and community sector is either directly or indirectly affecting the resources and capacity in organisations to develop skills and adequately train staff to appropriate levels

- 28.6% of organisations reported having at least one vacancy. This compares to 11% reported for all sectors. Just under half of all organisations (48.2%) which reported having vacancies felt that they were difficult to fill. This compares to 52% for all sectors.
- Posts in healthcare provision (11.5%), youth workers (10.9%) and social care provision (10.7%) were perceived to be the posts most difficult to fill.
- The most common reason given by organisations as to why they experience hard to fill vacancies relates to a lack of high level/specific skills amongst applicants (21.1%).
- The most frequently mentioned skills that organisations would like to see improved in applicants were strategic planning and forward thinking and the strategic use of ICT (13.7% and 10.4% respectively).
- Overall just over one third of organisations (34.5%) felt that the recruitment of fundraisers was likely to get more difficult in the future.

	NI Skills Monitoring Survey 2005 <sup>1</sup>	NI Voluntary and Community Sector Skills Survey 2008
Current vacancies (% employers)	11%	29%
All employers with difficult to fill vacancies	6%	14%
Difficult to fill vacancies (% of all vacancies)	52%	48%
Hard to fill vacancies based on skills	34%	49%
Skills gaps (% employers)	9%	12%

The challenge for organisations appears to be simply finding the right kind of staff. This survey found that of all the vacancies organisations had, just under half were deemed to be difficult to fill. The reasons for this could be wide ranging, such as a lack of understanding about the sector amongst potential applicants or because there are concerns about job security, or the terms and conditions of posts may all have a part to play.

## Skills gaps

Skills gaps exist across the voluntary and community sector with just over one in ten organisations (12%) reporting that in at least one function in their organisation there is a skills gap. Nevertheless skills levels amongst current paid staff are generally felt to be of the right level but where gaps do exist they are related to a lack of funding for training and development.

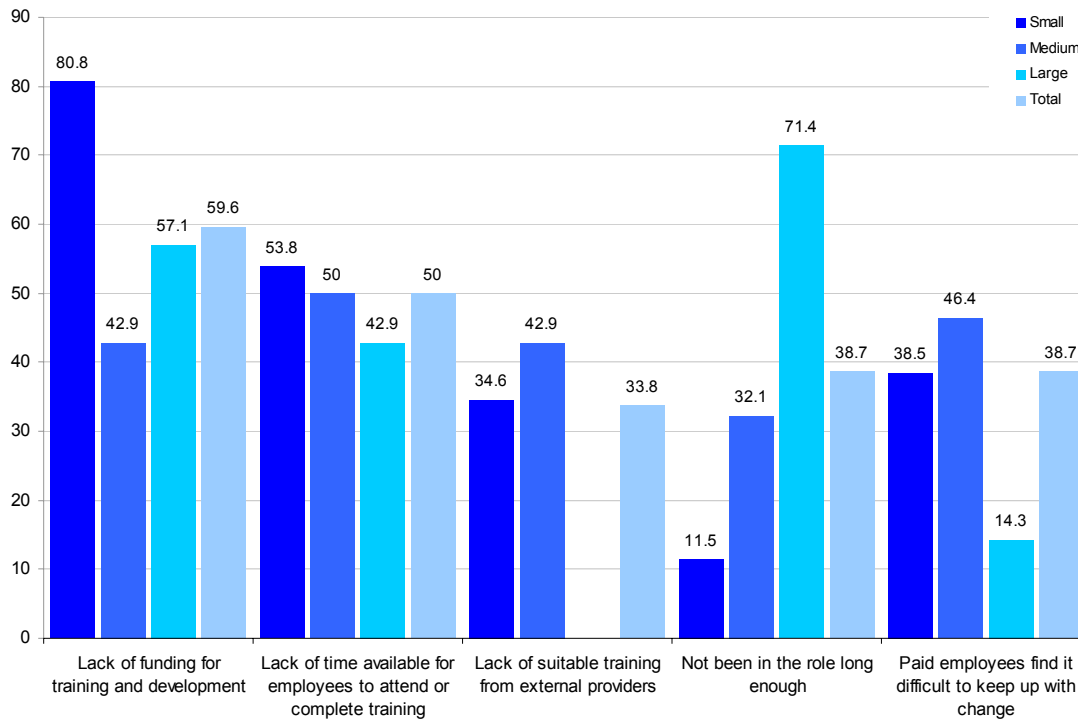
Current and future skills needs in relation to management and leadership are of particular importance to organisations. Strategic planning, procurement/contract management, managing change and financial management are all perceived to be significant skills gaps amongst paid staff.

- Just over one in ten employers (12.1%) reported having at least one function in their organisation in which they considered there to be a skills gap.
- Organisations were most likely to identify skills gaps amongst direct support staff (18.5%), volunteer managers (12.5%), community development workers (11.9%) and project managers (9.5%).
- The most commonly mentioned skills that organisations felt there was a gap were strategic planning and forward thinking (43.8%), legal knowledge (41.7%) and the strategic use of ICT (41.3%).
- A lack of funding and a lack of time for training and development are identified as the main causes of skills gaps (59.6% and 50.0% respectively).

<sup>1</sup> The NI Skills Monitoring Survey 2005 was based on the responses of 4,216 employers and covered all sectors in the Standard Industrial Classification (SIC2003).

- The most frequently cited future skills needs related to legal knowledge, strategic planning and forward thinking, and fundraising (24.3%, 20.4% and 20.4% respectively).

## Main causes for paid employees not having sufficient skills by size of organisation



Base: Organisations reporting under-skilled staff - 26 small organisations (1-4 employees), 28 medium organisations (5-24 employees), 7 large organisations (25 plus employees).

In relation to future skills, the needs expressed by organisations in relation to legal knowledge, strategic planning and forward thinking, and fundraising all point to the importance of organisations having to adapt to a changing environment. There is a consistent thread that runs throughout this analysis from the discussions concerning skills shortages through existing skills gaps and finally to future skills needs. Organisations need skills developed that will assist them to fully utilise opportunities available to them and to adapt to and manage change.

## Training and workforce development

Organisations take training and development seriously, as is proven by the fact that the policies and procedures to identify current and future training needs are common amongst voluntary and community organisations. However, this research found that the finances are not always in place to translate these policies into action.

- Just under three quarters of employers (74.1%) formally assess whether individuals have gaps in their skills.

- 76.5% of organisations have a formal business plan and 72.6% have a training and development policy. However, just under half of all organisations link the level and type of training needed to their business plan.
- 43.1% of organisations stated they have not experienced any problems in arranging and providing training for staff. However, beyond this a lack of funds (39.8%), time (28.2%) and cover (24.2%) were the most common reasons given as to why organisations have not arranged training for staff.
- 57.0% of respondents stated they were aware of NVQs appropriate to their organisations. Almost three out of every ten organisations (29.2%) wanted further information whilst only 13.8% were not aware of any appropriate NVQs.

If almost six out of every ten employers (58.1%) have a training budget but a lack of funding is regularly cited as a reason not to be able to train staff, further work is required to look at the size of budgets against the cost of training in order to meet the training needs of employees. The tables below examine the average training budgets by size of organisation.

### Training budget by size of organisation

	Small	Medium	Large	All
Average budget per organisation (£)	£2,056	£3,932	£11,754	<b>£4,258</b>
Average budget per employee (£)	£400	£241	£74	<b>£145</b>

Base: all employers who responded that they did have a training budget (515 organisations).

The average annual training budget is approximately £4,258. This equates to an average of £145 per employee.

## Conclusion

For the first time we now have a comprehensive picture of the skills gaps and shortages, and future training and development aspirations, in the voluntary and community sector in Northern Ireland. Of course one study will never fully articulate the complex nature of the voluntary and community sector but it does provide an important foundation on which a more strategic and co-ordinated approach to skills development in the voluntary and community sector can be built.

One of the key outcomes of this project has been the invaluable information on how the voluntary and community sector relates to each of the SSCs. This research comes at a very important time as the debate about how this relationship will be developed and maintained over the coming years is happening now. The challenge for both SSCs and the voluntary and community sector will be how this relationship is managed in the future. There are obvious implications for organisations with limited resources in terms of their ability to establish relationships with a number of SSCs. If as is expected the current

arrangements for SCCs and the voluntary and community sector change and a Workforce Development Council for the sector is developed there are implications for all stakeholders. There must be a strong link between the Workforce Development Council, the SSCs and the voluntary and community sector if all parties are to work together effectively. The Workforce Development Council, or whatever structure is decided upon, must act as a conduit between the SCCs and the voluntary and community sector to ensure the sector has a coherent voice in terms of skills development.

A feature of this research is the extent to which there are a number of commonalities that exist amongst organisations in relation to skills needs and training and development. A number have been discussed above and any long-term observer or worker in the voluntary and community sector will recognise many of the issues covered in this report. Nevertheless the overriding message from this research is that a single solution does not exist in terms of addressing skills gaps and shortages in the voluntary and community sector.

## Acknowledgements

The Steering Group would like to thank the Sectoral Development Branch, DEL for funding this research. Thanks must go to all the members of the Steering Group who gave so generously of their time in helping to develop and guide this research.

We would also like to thank all the individuals who took the time out of their busy schedules to respond to the survey.

We would also like to thank NICVA who conducted the research and Customer and Marketing Surveys for their assistance in carrying out the telephone survey.

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