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| SCSLG Supervisor Development Survey |
| Report on the findingsFebuary 2021 |

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# 1.0 Introduction, methodology and sample

## Introduction

The Supply Chain Safety Leadership Group was formed to give focus to improving safety performance across the Highways England road network through collaborative working across the supply chain where common risks exist and to provide a unified voice for the sector.

The Supply Chain Safety Leadership Group’s vision is to create a very clear shift in safety performance to ensure everyone who works with us and everyone who travels on the network gets home safe and well.

One of the Group’s initiatives is the Development of our Supervisor Community. The skills that our workforce possess are one of the most valuable assets we have within our industry, especially those skills held by our supervisory employees, who can influence the behaviour of those around them. Consequently, it is important that we continue to develop these employees. The first step in the initiative to develop our supervisory community was to conduct a survey to help the Group understand the existing level of skills and training available in our sector, any issues and skills areas that need additional development.

A survey was therefore sent out to all companies within the supply chain to gather their thoughts and opinions between October 2020 and January 2021.

The information gathered from the survey is presented in this report and will be used to address problems and to develop training that helps level up our supervisory employees and as a result the performance of our entire industry.

## Methodology and sample

A total of 74 respondents took part in the survey. We received multiple responses from a number of companies and so in these cases, responses to the number of employee questions (below) have only been counted once. Multiple responses from companies to the wider survey questions around barriers, challenges and skills areas that need development have been included in the analysis.

Surveys were completed online between October 2020 and January 2021.

Companies completing the survey had between 30 and 14,384 employees in total, with an average of 1,669. The breakdown between direct and indirect employees are detailed in the table below.

**Table 1.2.1 – How many employees does your company have?**

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | **Minimum** | **Maximum** | Average | Number of companies\* |
| TOTAL number of employees | 30 | 14,384 | 1,669 | 65 |
| Number of direct employees | 10 | 14,384 | 1,360 | 62 |
| Number of indirect employees (e.g. sub-contract/ agency/ consultancy) | 0 | 7,500 | 325 | 62 |

\*the number of individual companies these figures are based on (excluding no response data)

As shown above, companies taking part in the survey had an average of 1,360 direct and 325 indirect employees.

Companies were then asked how many of these employees were in ‘site based supervisory roles’. This ranged from 0 to 1,204 with an average of 137. Again, the breakdown by direct and indirect employees is detailed in the table below.

**Table 1.2.2 – And how many of these employees are in ‘site based supervisory roles’?**

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | **Minimum** | **Maximum** | Average | Number of companies\* |
| TOTAL number of ‘site based supervisory employees’ | 0 | 1,204 | 137 | 61 |
| Number of direct ‘site based supervisory employees’ | 0 | 1,101 | 110 | 61 |
| Number of indirect ‘site based supervisory employees’ (e.g. sub-contract/ agency/ consultancy) | 0 | 750 | 28 | 59 |

 \*the number of individual companies these figures are based on (excluding no response data)

As shown above, companies claimed to have an average of 110 direct employees in ‘site based supervisory roles’ and 28 indirect employees in ‘site based supervisory roles’.

On average, 18.5% of total employees at companies were in ‘site based supervisory roles’, with this ranging from 0% to 100% across the companies taking part in the survey.

**Table 1.2.3 – Proportion of employees in ‘site based supervisory roles’?**

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | **Minimum** | **Maximum** | Average | Number of companies\* |
| Proportion of total employees in ‘site based supervisory roles’ | 0% | 100% | 18.5% | 60 |

 \*the number of individual companies these figures are based on (excluding no response data)

# Detailed Findings

This section details the responses to the survey with tables and charts used to show results and verbatim comments included where relevant.

## Skills needs

In considering which technical and operational skill areas need additional development within their current site supervisory population highest proportions (almost half) referred to ‘planning, cost control and commercial awareness’.

**Chart 2.1.1 – Thinking about your current site supervisory population, which of the following would you say are the top 3 technical and operational skill areas that need additional development?**

Base: all respondents (74)

As shown above, one third of respondents suggested ‘Sustainability and Environment’ and ‘risk assessment/identification of potential risk’ to be technical and operational skill areas that need additional development. Approximately one in five suggested each of ‘quality of work and delivery’ and ‘reporting and data management’ to be in their top 3 technical and operational skill areas that needed additional development, with smaller proportions referring to each of ‘briefings’, ‘legislative compliance’ and ‘design’.

Only 11% of respondents suggested they currently had no technical and operational skill areas that needed additional development.

In considering which managerial, leadership, behavioural or soft skills areas need additional development within their current site supervisory population highest proportions referred to ‘managing team performance’, ‘Mental Health and Wellbeing’ and ‘inclusive leadership and culture’.

**Chart 2.1.2 – Thinking about your current site supervisory population, which of the following would you say are the top 3 managerial/leadership/behavioural/soft skills areas that need additional development?**

Base: all respondents (74)

As shown above, one in three suggested ‘developing self and others’ to be in their top 3 managerial, leadership, behavioural or soft skill areas that need additional development, with 28% referring to ‘communication with the workforce’, 24% ‘customer and client relations’ and 23% ‘communication with the wider project team’.

Only 4% (3 respondents) suggested they did not currently have any managerial, leadership, behavioural or soft skill areas that need additional development.

In discussing how they currently undertake skills needs analysis with their site based supervisory population to help identify training and experience needs, highest proportions (78%) referred to Periodic/Annual Performance Evaluation Reviews.

**Chart 2.1.3 – Which of the following do you use to undertake skills needs analysis with your site supervisory population to help identify training and experience needs?**

Base: all respondents (74)

As shown above, almost 3 out of 4 (72%) referred to ongoing/on-the-job personal feedback and 57% to coaching/mentoring/shadowing.

Only 5% (4 respondents) suggested they do not currently undertake skills needs analysis. ‘Other’ tools referred to here to undertake skills needs analysis included skills and competency matrix, frameworks, mapping and reporting tools.

## Training and Development Programmes

Some 85% of respondents claimed to currently have training and development programmes within their organisation that develop their site based supervisors (either internal, external or a combination of the two).

**Chart 2.2.1 – Do you currently have any training and development programmes within your organisation that develop your site based supervisors?**

Base: all respondents (74)

As shown above, in the majority of cases, employers had a combination of internal and external training and development programmes, with 12% having only internal and 5% only external training and development programmes.

Some 12% however claim to currently not have training and development programmes (internal or external) to develop their site based supervisors.

In summarising the areas covered in training and development programmes they use to develop their site based supervisors, respondents referred to a range of specific areas of training and qualifications. Table 2.2.1 summarises those most frequently referred to.

**Table 2.2.1 – Please provide a brief summary of the areas covered in training and development programmes you use to develop your site based supervisors?**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
|  | Number of respondents |
| Leadership Training | 10 |
| Health and Safety | 10 |
| SSSTS | 9 |
| SMSTS | 8 |
| Mental Health Awareness | 8 |
| First Aid | 7 |
| NVQ | 6 |
| ILM | 5 |
| Health and Wellbeing | 4 |
| IOSH | 4 |
| Apprenticeships | 4 |
| Critical Worker Medicals | 3 |
| Plant Awareness | 3 |
| Hazard Awareness | 3 |
| Black Hat/Black Hat forums | 2 |

As shown most frequent references were made to Leadership training and Health and Safety. SSSTS and SMSTS were also frequently discussed, along with references to Mental Health Awareness and First Aid.

The majority of respondents provided detailed explanations of their training offer and a full list of detailed responses is available as a separate document.

## Access to training

Just over two-thirds (70%) of respondents claimed not have experienced any difficulty over the last year in finding an appropriate external training provider for the supervisory training they needed to do, with a further 11% suggesting this was not applicable to them.

**Chart 2.3.1 – Have you experienced any difficulty over the last year in finding an appropriate external training provider for the supervisor training you need to do?**

Base: all respondents (74)

As shown, some 15% had experienced difficulties over the last year in finding an appropriate external training provider for the supervisory training they needed to do.

In considering what types of training they have found it difficult to satisfy through providers outside of their organisation, respondents made references to training needs being bespoke in the industry, finding suitable ‘off the shelf’ training courses being challenging and the cost of training being a barrier.

*“As some training needs in the highways sector/some trades are quite bespoke and industry needs are not fully defined it can be difficult sometimes in finding something which is both relevant and readily available.”*

*“Soft skills - managing performance; communication. All very expensive, and not targeted to industry - this makes it very difficult to persuade budget controllers to spend.”*

*“[We] are a specialist subcontractor and we best understand the needs and risks of our trade, traditionally we struggled to identify an off the shelf training course suitable for supervisor development, to overcome this we chose to engage with Cleartrack and developed our own leadership course. We have engaged on a three year journey which will develop our supervisors, chargehands and identified future leaders.”*

Other individual respondents referred here to…

*“Leadership skills in that construction Supervisor role capacity.”*

*“Slinger signaller.”*

*“Supervisor inductions.”*

Some 5 respondents stated here that not being able to access the training they needed within the last 12 months was due to Covid-19 with training being cancelled or training schools being closed.

*“Due to Covid majority of training schools have been closed.”*

*“Everything – due to Covid mainly.”*

*“Lot of training has been cancelled due to Covid, but normally finding training is good.”*

*“Only because of the current pandemic. Usually it’s no issue.”*

*“SSSTS & SMSTS due to COVID restrictions.”*

## Barriers to building capacity of site based supervisors

In considering what barriers they encounter when building the capacity of their site based supervisors, highest proportions of respondents referred to ‘time allowed for training (having time to release a supervisor for training’.

**Chart 2.4.1 – What barriers do you encounter when building the capacity of your site based supervisors?**

Base: all respondents (74)

As shown, 35% referred to ‘continuity of work’ as a barrier here, with one in four (26%) referring to ‘conflicting project requirements from customers’. Smaller proportions referred to ‘funding’, ‘clarity of skills needed’, ‘lack of interest from supervisory population’, ‘staff turnover’ and ‘quality of training’.

As shown, only 16% (12 respondents) suggested they did not encounter and barriers when building the capacity of their site based supervisors.

‘Other’ barriers referred to here included continuity of work close to home, with not all employees being happy to travel to far locations, self awareness of skills gaps, risk assessment and method statement review and production, finding the time to act on requirements identified and Covid-19.

## Recruitment

Just under half (47%) of respondents suggested they find it difficult to fill supervisory vacancies.

**Chart 2.5.1 – Do you ever find it difficult to fill supervisory vacancies?**

Base: all respondents (74)

As shown above, 50% did not find it difficult to fill supervisory vacancies with a further 3% not providing a response to this question.

Those who did find it difficult to fill supervisory vacancies were asked what challenges they faced, with highest proportions referring to ‘applicants lacking the relevant skills’ and ‘applicants lacking the relevant experience’.

**Chart 2.5.2 – What challenges do you face in recruiting to supervisory positions?**

Base: respondents who find it difficult to fill supervisory vacancies (35)

As shown in chart 2.5.2, just under one in three of those who found it difficult to fill supervisory vacancies suggested this to be due to ‘applicants lacking the necessary qualifications’, ‘location of role’ and ‘lack of applicants/lack of interest in role’. Smaller proportions referred to ‘applicants lacking motivation/right attitude’ and ‘jobs entailing shifts/unsociable hours’.

‘Other’ references here included feeling there was a skill shortage across the industry, demand being greater than supply in areas, issues with pay, terms and conditions and a lack of behavioural and communication skills.

*“Big skill shortage across the industry.”*

*“In the industry as a whole, there is a shortage of quality candidates.”*

*“It's a combination of the above. Finding the right people, with the right attitude, with the right competency, qualifications and experience in the right geography can present a challenge.”*

*“Pay, terms and conditions. Supervisors are often reluctant to move to an annual salary as it can be a significant drop in earnings from hourly paid and overtime contracts.”*

## Views on standardising the supervisory development

Some 58% of respondents felt standardising the supervisory development programme would help with the attraction and retention of supervisors, with 38% not feeling this would be the case.

**Chart 2.6.1 – Do you think by standardising the supervisory development programme this would help with the attraction and retention of supervisors?**

Base: all respondents (74)

In considering why they felt standardising the supervisory development programme would help the attraction and retention of supervisors, respondents most frequently referred to having benchmark standards, it providing clearer career/development paths and helping supervisors to be more transferable across the sector.

**Table 2.6.1 – Why do you think by standardising the supervisory development programme this would help with the attraction and retention of supervisors?**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
|  | Number of respondents |
| Benchmark standards/same level across industry | 10  |
| Structured training programme/common approach across the sector | 7 |
| Help supervisors to be more transferable across the sector | 6 |
| Clearer career/development path in the industry | 5 |
| Make supervisor population feel more valued/improve morale | 3 |
| Prevent duplication of training | 1 |
| Other | 3 |

A selection of verbatim quotes are provided below to highlight each of the topic areas coded in table 2.6.1.

Benchmark standards/same level across industry:-

*“Because the individual would see this as the benchmark standard.”*

*“Because at present there are varying requirements for supervisory competence across the industry as well as between the Tier 1’s. The additional training and development required sometimes can be discouraging to new applicants.”*

*“Useful to have a consistent benchmark standard across the industry.”*

*“It would help set the benchmark and minimum levels for Supervisors.”*

*“Having a standard approach will allow for consistency across highways schemes and supervisors will understand what is expected of them working across projects.”*

*“Common industry standards are always good as everyone commits to meet the same, recognised standard.”*

Structured training programme/common approach across the sector:-

*“It will also give individual employees/supervisors the confidence that there is a common approach and standard of training and development across the sector.”*

*“The common approach to the supervisory development programme would benefit the supervisor by covering all the training needs both now and future. This consideration of the employee would perhaps make some supervisors more loyal to the company.”*

*“Like any other skill, selecting a prospective supervisor is made easier when the training is on a level playing field. It removes one variable.”*

*“Clear and consistent expectations across the sector.”*

*“Clarity of role and responsibilities backed up by tailored development programme.”*

Help supervisors to be more transferable across the sector:-

*“Would help supervisors be more transferable across the sector.”*

*“Enable supervisors to take common competencies across the sector if/when changing roles.”*

*“They would be able to come to us with what they need to be able to fit into a role with minimal training needed.”*

*“I do not believe it would help with retention as we do not have an issue but it would be beneficial to have all staff working towards the same standards enabling transfers around the business and sector.”*

*“From the perspective of an employer a pro would be less work to develop supervisors recruited from other contractors, but that itself is a con as it may then be more difficult to retain own supervisors if their skills are more transferable to others.”*

Clearer career/development path in the industry:-

*“It would help the industry give a clear career path.”*

*“This would be very useful for personal development, and it then provides Supervisors a clear development pathway which is uniform. Currently there is no clear standard as to what good should look like across the industry.”*

*“This would map out a clear roadmap of development for potential employee and demonstrate competence to the employer.”*

*“A clear career path with stated Core Objectives and a route to succession in the industry gives aspiring Supervisor candidates something tangible to aim at.”*

Make supervisor population feel more valued/improve morale:-

*“Structured training programme with the right resources shows this population is valued.”*

*“This demonstrates to those in such roles the commitment to develop them fully to better equip them for the role they're undertaking. This ultimately improves morale and employee engagement, leading to increased retention among this group.”*

*“By having a strong development programme in place will allow our supervisory employees to feel invested in and therefore promote a learning culture where our employees will continually develop their skillset. This can only have a positive impact on our business.”*

Prevent duplication of training:-

*“This would also prevent duplication of training - often companies will require employees to attend training that is very similar to that received in previous roles with other employers.”*

Other:-

*“Yes if the standardised outcome incorporates the best elements from the wide range currently used across the community, though development is only one element of attraction and retention.”*

*“It would give a level of consistency to the Business in terms of consistent supervision and culture however I don’t believe it would have a strong impact on the attraction or retention of supervisors.”*

*“We tend to hire contract/agency staff to fulfil our site-based supervisory needs. We find this appears to be a community that is diminishing. Therefore, a standardized programme with the focus of upskilling a new community of people will help to fill that identified skills gap.”*

Those who did not feel standardising the supervisory development programme would help the attraction and retention of supervisors referred to concern that ‘one size does not fit all’ and that specialist/bespoke requirements still remain.

**Table 2.6.2 – Why do you not think standardising the supervisory development programme would help with the attraction and retention of supervisors?**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
|  | Number of respondents |
| Specialist/bespoke requirements still remain/Cannot all be generic | 9 |
| No impact/unlikely to have impact on attraction and retention of supervisory roles | 3 |
| One size does not fit all | 2 |
| Prefer internal process to progress supervisors | 1 |
| Lack of supervisors with relevant experience | 1 |
| Main barriers are not around training | 1 |
| Other | 5 |

A selection of verbatim quotes are provided below to highlight each of the topic areas coded in table 2.6.2. A full list of comments is available as a separate document.

Specialist/bespoke requirements still remain/ Cannot all be generic:-

*“This would only work if it was totally relevant to our company. I would not wish to shoe horn a "generic" scheme into our own bespoke requirements.”*

*“Every supervisor needs to have a personal development plan to suit their personal needs and the projects.”*

*“We think it would be a good thing to standardise training but we also need to consider that supervisors of specialist activity need a complete understanding of the processes they are controlling. Road marking by their nature are remote small team operations, making direct supervision of activities difficult, the small team is generally supervised by the chargehand doing the lining work.”*

*“Different work types require specialist supervisory skills and therefore we would generally end up retraining in addition to any standard programme.”*

*“Because each business has its own requirements to suit their client and business needs.”*

*“Because different roles need a different skill set, building a road is different to building bridges.”*

No impact/unlikely to have impact on attraction and retention of supervisory roles:-

*“It would definitely help on the skills of the supervision, and uniformity of competences. I'm not sure it would help on the attraction and retention side.”*

*“Having a standardised programme will not have an impact on the attraction or retention of supervisors within the Traffic Management Industry as their are multiple factors that contribute to gaining and keeping people in these roles.”*

*“Although it wouldn't necessarily help with attraction or retention of staff, it would be useful to have an industry standardised supervisory programme, in addition to the training already carried out for our supervisory staff. This would help to create a standardised approach across the industry.”*

One size does not fit all:-

*“One size doesn’t fit all.”*

*“A standard, one size fits all approach is not likely to be transferable from one organisation to the next without significant on-boarding.”*

Prefer internal process to progress supervisors:-

*“We believe in using the internal process to progress Supervisors within the business, always looking to giving the opportunity to progress inside the business.”*

Lack of supervisors with relevant experience:-

*“Not enough young supervisors with relevant experience coming through. Lots of younger applicants have tended to go down the Engineering route meaning there is a gap with regards to Foreman and Site Supervisors.”*

Main barriers are not around training:-

*“Main barriers are around continuity and location of work, not training.”*

Other:-

*“We don't struggle finding people with management skills but with jacking or cathodic protection skills. Whilst we do upskill staff, losing a few staff at the same time would be an issue.”*

*“Unless an industry accredited qualification was offered, supervisors will work for companies where they feel comfortable.”*

*“Supervisors are generally promoted into the role because they are happy to earn more money but they don't always want the responsibility, a real issue with working supervisors who are part of a team and also meant to be pulling people up when something is not safe.”*

*“I see no requirement to add complication. We need our supervisors to be aware of expectations and can help them to develop in their role. Enthusiasm and work ethic is extremely important and this is not necessarily the result of standardised training programmes.”*

Respondents were given the opportunity to provide additional feedback at the end of the survey with regards to what they would like the SCSLG to consider within the scope of this work.

Many respondents made positive comments about having clear standards and working together for the benefit of the industry as a whole. A willingness to be involved in taking this forward, sharing their experiences and best practice examples, and being interested in seeing the results of the survey and the next steps were all discussed.

A detailed list of full responses provided is available as a separate document.