

future fit   
**TRAINING**



**RAISING THE BAR**

**NOVEMBER 2015**

In partnership with



More people  
More active  
More often





# Foreword

It has been clear for some time that the leisure industry does not have enough confidence in the capability of some of its key job roles to deliver what is required for an evolving sector. The sector is constantly developing to incorporate various elements including technology and health, and it is crucial the workforce keeps pace with these developments in order to meet its ambition to be a frontline deliverer of wellbeing. A changing sector requires a changing workforce and this is not currently being delivered.



More people  
More active  
More often

Whilst ukactive already has an extensive understanding of the sector's concerns in this area, some of the statistics arising from this consultation were still deeply concerning such as the fact that not one employer claimed they were satisfied with the current Level 3 Personal Trainer qualification, one of the sector's most crucial roles.

This research, combined with corresponding existing research in this field, is extremely valuable in highlighting and confirming where key skills gaps exist and what employers would like to see introduced in order to improve this. The failure of the current system is costing businesses valuable time and resources that could be better used elsewhere. However, as a sector, we are now coming to terms with and facing down this issue.

The sector is in agreement that training and assessment standards are not satisfactory in their current state, we have identified where the skills gaps lie and it is now time to implement change in the sector to correct this. Following a confirmation from employers through a series of events in 2014 and 2015, the leisure sector, via ukactive's Membership Council, made a clear call to regulators that the skills development pathway for physical activity should be held within a single body responsible for the administration of an updated skills pathway from levels 1-7. It has tasked its Chartered Institute, CIMSPA, with the role of delivering this in consultation with, but under the direct control of employers.

It is essential to ensure the sector is united on this issue, as it is necessary to have the backing of a broad range of stakeholders in order for any reforms to successfully take hold. The next step is the development of a long-term workforce development strategy, housing all job roles within the sector in one place and creating a unified structure with clear pathways and progression for people joining our workforce. We have to invest in the development of a new, comprehensive and dynamic skills structure that our industry needs.




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***ukactive welcomes this partnership with Future Fit Training, in taking a joined-up approach to move the agenda forward and ensure we have a workforce able to meet the demands of the future***

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**Steven Ward**, ukactive Executive Director

The impetus for the research that Future Fit Training is presenting here with “Raising the Bar” started in part with last year’s ukactive and CIMSPA seminars which laid out our workforce development ambitions and featured a positive contribution from Future Fit Training.

At the time, CIMSPA and ukactive were united in the belief that 2015 would need to be the year when actions spoke louder than words, and this is the philosophy we’ve carried forward.

After extensive consultation with employers, a skills matrix for the sector is now a reality, which will rapidly evolve to a total five skills matrices covering every job role in the sector, showing pathways for individuals to follow.

Also, working in partnership with employers, our first two apprenticeship standards have also been approved for implementation by government.

Building on these milestones, CIMSPA is committed to continued joint working with key partners such as ukactive to increase both the pace and positive impact of our workforce development project.

CIMSPA therefore welcomes and supports this important new research from Future Fit Training, which adds real value to our understanding of the sector’s needs and how we should shape our work to meet these needs.



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**Tara Dillon, CIMSPA CEO**





# Introduction

Future Fit Training, in partnership with ukactive, has carried out an extensive consultation with some of the sector's largest operators, with the goal of exposing current satisfaction levels surrounding the skills and workforce development agenda. Through an annual survey and interview process, Future Fit has sought to gauge employer opinions on issues including; methods of training, assessment standards, skills requirements and employment pathways, with a view to investigating how training providers can better ensure exercise professionals are able to keep up with the ever-changing business models within the sector.

The 'Raising the Bar' report will track perceptions, attitudes and concerns with the sector's workforce year-on-year. The process began in 2014, with a comprehensive survey followed by one-to-one consultation with human resource representatives, senior managers and CEOs from some of the foremost employers in the sector. As well as highlighting some of the key statistics gathered from the survey last year, combined with this year's survey data, the information gathered from these follow-up interviews and meetings will support the statistics, through anonymous quotes from sector leaders.

The activity sector is undergoing significant change, with opportunities ranging from the increased commissioning of physical activity counselling services by local authorities, to the provision of e-learning resources and many more, all of which challenge the traditional role of exercise professionals in the sector. The rapidly changing state of the leisure sector means we need to incorporate issues such as Public Health, special populations, nutrition, technology and new equipment. These areas demand a changing workforce, yet skills for our key job descriptors have not kept pace with these developments in the sector.

The sector is uniform in its opinion that more needs to be done to create a workforce fit for tomorrow's challenges.

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***The sector is uniform in its opinion that more needs to be done to create a workforce fit for tomorrow's challenges***

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# Analysis

The survey responses highlighted employer frustration across many of the areas assessed, with satisfaction levels low across the board in terms of skills, assessment, training and standards.

## Perhaps the most concerning of statistics

Not one respondent is satisfied that the current content of the Level 3 Personal Training Qualification meets the needs of the fitness industry.

Not one respondent believes that the current assessment methods are robust enough or include sufficient practical assessment to ensure PTs are fit for industry.

100% of respondents answered either 'yes' or 'sometimes' as to whether they have to provide additional training to fitness staff, in addition to core qualifications, to ensure their staff are "work ready".

89% are not happy with the period of time over which training is delivered by commercial training providers for core fitness staff.

When employers were asked to indicate whether they are happy with the period of time over which training is delivered by commercial training providers for core fitness staff, particularly Personal Trainers (on a scale of 1-5 with 5 being 'very happy' and 1 being 'not at all happy'), not one respondent gave a score of more than 3. This demonstrates that employers want to see more robust training and assessment procedures.

Views on current assessment standards were unambiguous, with not one of the respondents believing that the current assessment methods inherent within commercial training programmes are robust enough or include sufficient practical assessment. Furthermore, all respondents answered either 'no' or 'not sure' to the question of whether the sector's current method of validating CPD provides sufficient confidence for an employer that a professional remains competent to fulfil their role. This highlights a lack of confidence in the provision of training across the sector and at all levels.

In terms of overcoming these issues; the majority of respondents agreed that all Personal Trainers should, as part of their qualification, undertake a prolonged assessment of a real-life candidate (not simulated) to demonstrate their ability to perform as a competent Personal Trainer. Furthermore, in the 2014 survey, 100% of respondents said they would support an initiative around practical assessments being put in place for all fitness qualifications. This unequivocal agreement from employers on greater exposure to real-life clients and situations for learners also reflects concerns around a lack of soft skills throughout the workforce, which could be improved through more experience working with the public as an integral part of their training.

Throughout the sector, employers have expressed dissatisfaction with the current level of training, with many feeling a need to provide additional training to fitness staff (on top of core qualifications) in order to ensure they are 'work ready'. Employers have highlighted some of the most significant

***Employers want to see more robust training and assessment procedures***

***Throughout the sector, employers have expressed dissatisfaction with the current level of training***



skills gaps in the workforce as being fundamental abilities such as social skills, behaviour change, motivational skills and business acumen. As well as this, many employers also report difficulty in attracting high-quality candidates in the first place due to an insufficient number of candidates, incorrect expectations upon entering the sector, as well as applicants lacking the skills required to be a successful Personal Trainer. As a result, many employers are having to dedicate extra resource to internal training procedures which should not be the case.

As it stands the sector's current minimum assessment and training standards are too low. The Register of Exercise Professionals (REPs)<sup>1</sup> provides a system of regulation for instructors and trainers to ensure that they meet the health and fitness industry's agreed national occupational standards, produced by SkillsActive. Membership of REPs is intended to provide assurance and confidence to consumers, employers and the health professions that all registered exercise professionals are appropriately qualified and have the knowledge, competence and skills to perform specific roles. However, according to employers surveyed, this is not currently the case.

The survey also demonstrated how engaged the sector's employers are with apprenticeships and the Trailblazer programme, with the majority of respondents running apprenticeship programmes within their own organisations, and all but one respondent claiming that they would like to hear more about the Trailblazer project if they were not already informed. This indicates that whilst satisfaction levels with current workforce development standards may be low, employers are willing to dedicate time and resource to rectify this.

Interestingly, there was some disagreement around the question 'Do you think that sector employers offer sufficient career opportunities and remuneration in order to attract high quality staff?' Approximately 22% of respondents in September 2015 answered 'yes', with the rest of those surveyed all claiming that they do not. Last year's survey data revealed a similar result, with 60% of respondents claiming that the sector does not offer sufficient career opportunities and remuneration in order to attract high-quality staff and 40% claiming it does. Of course, this will play a crucial role in attracting the workforce of the future, so it is vital that employers are confident that they are offering sufficient and attractive career opportunities to new recruits.

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***Employers have highlighted some of the most significant skills gaps in the workforce as being fundamental abilities such as social skills, behaviour change, motivational skills and business acumen***

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<sup>1</sup> The Register of Exercise Professionals, Part of SkillsActive, 2015, <http://www.exerciseregister.org/>





# At a glance

## What respondents said

Not one respondent is satisfied that the current content of the Level 3 Personal Training Qualification meets the needs of the fitness industry

Not one respondent believes that the current assessment methods are robust enough or include sufficient practical assessment to ensure PTs are fit for industry

**100%** of respondents answered either 'yes' or 'sometimes' as to whether they have to provide additional training to fitness staff

**89%** are not happy with the period of time over which training is delivered by commercial training providers for core fitness staff

**78%** think that sector employers do not offer sufficient career opportunities and remuneration in order to attract high quality staff

The sector's current method of validating CPD does not provide sufficient confidence for an employer that a professional remains competent to fulfil their role

There is a lack of social skills, behaviour change, motivational skills and business acumen throughout the workforce

## What respondents want

All Personal Trainers to undertake a prolonged assessment of a real-life candidate

Practical assessments for all fitness qualifications

To hear more about the Trailblazer project

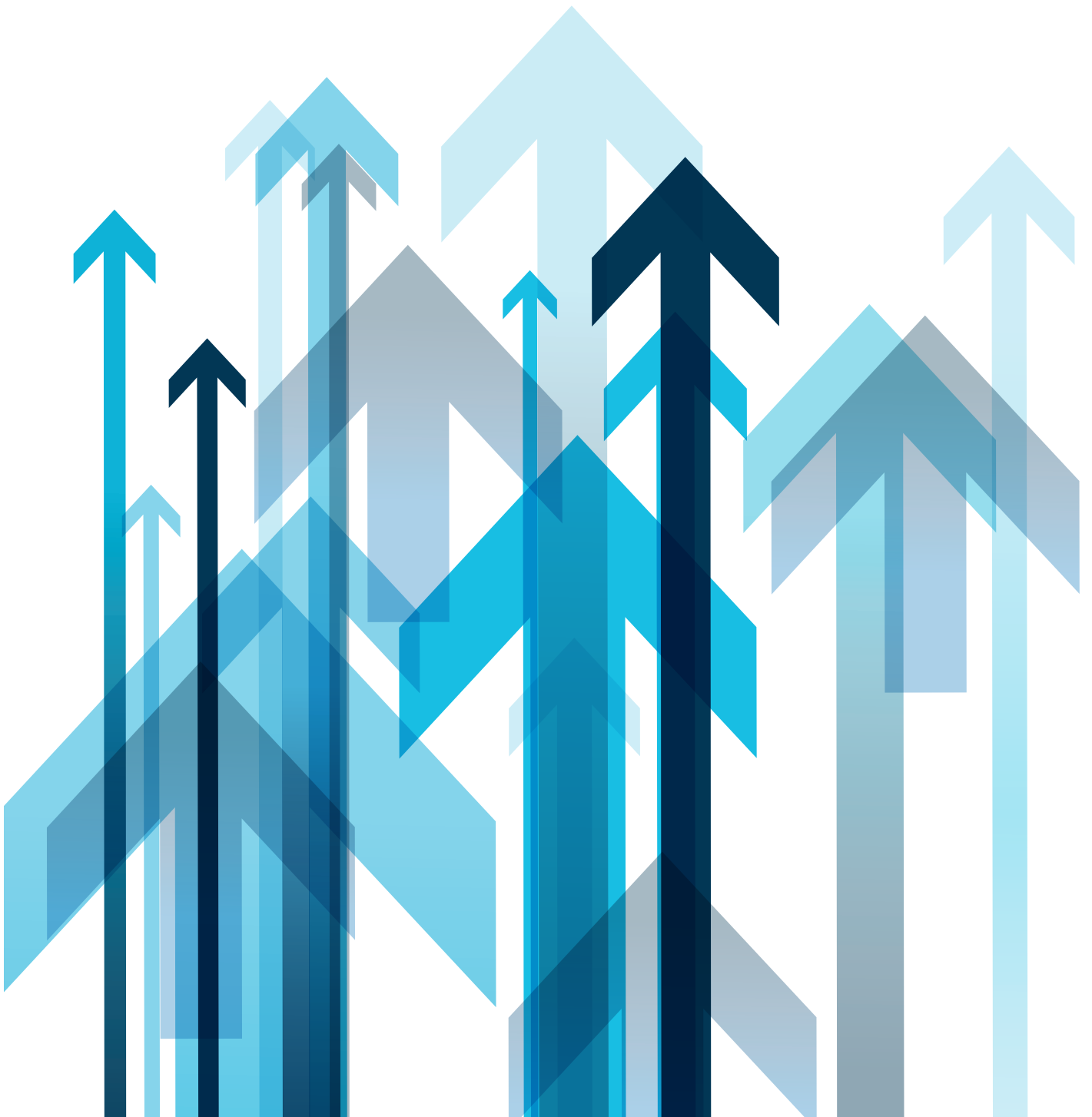
More robust training and assessment procedures

To dedicate time and resource to influence the improvement of current workforce development standards

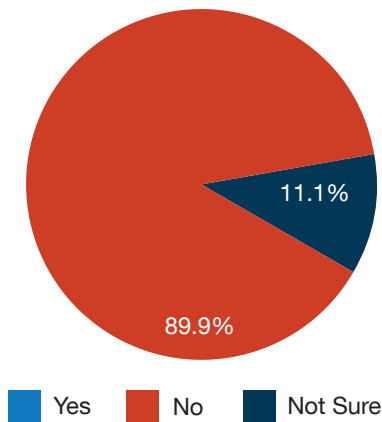
More in-depth training of PTs by commercial training providers to ensure skills gaps such as social skills, behaviour change, motivational skills and business acumen are covered as standard



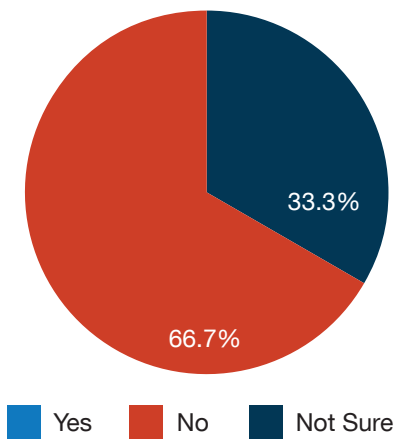
# A graphical representation of a selection of the survey responses



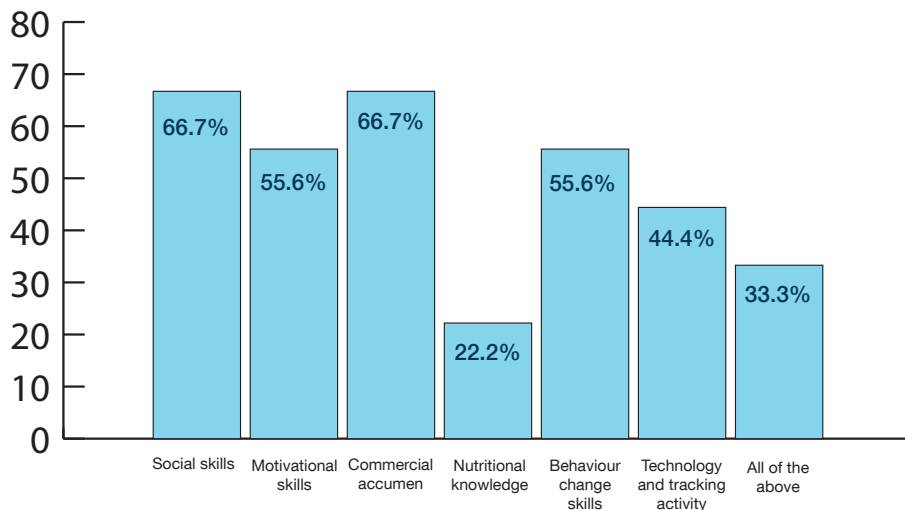
Are you satisfied that the current content of the Level 3 Personal Training qualification meets the needs of the fitness industry?



Do you think that the current assessment methods inherent within commercial training programmes are robust enough and include sufficient practical assessment to ensure PTs are fit for industry upon achievement of the qualification?



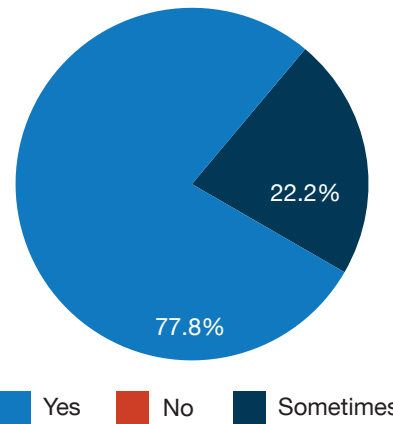
What are the key skills gaps among Personal Trainers and Fitness Instructors?



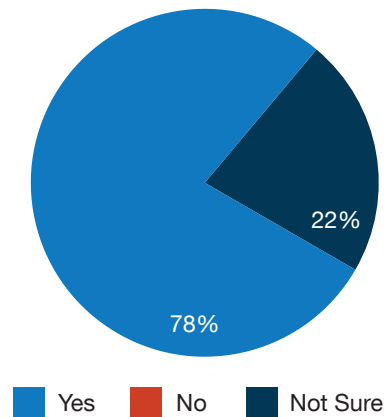
*Not one respondent believes that the current assessment methods are robust enough or include sufficient practical assessment to ensure PTs are fit for industry*

**100% of employers believe that there should be a minimum number of hours' experience working in a gym prior to achievement**

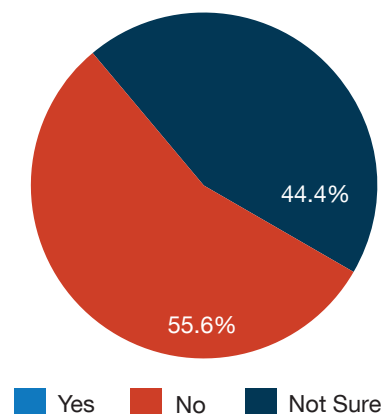
Do you have to provide additional training to fitness staff (in addition to core qualifications) in order to ensure they are 'work ready'?



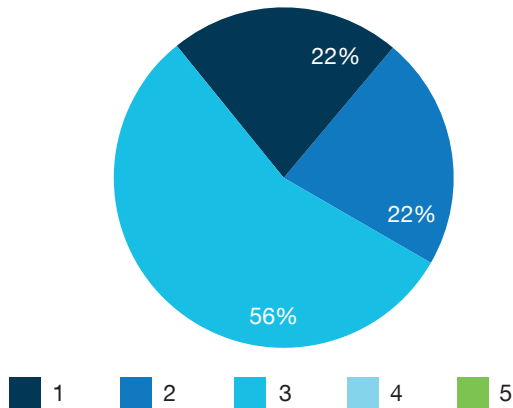
Do you think that all Personal Trainers, as part of their qualification, should undertake a prolonged assessment of a real-life candidate (not simulated) to demonstrate their ability to perform as a competent Personal Trainer?



Do you think that the sector's current method of validating CPD provides sufficient confidence for an employer that a professional remains competent to fulfil their role?

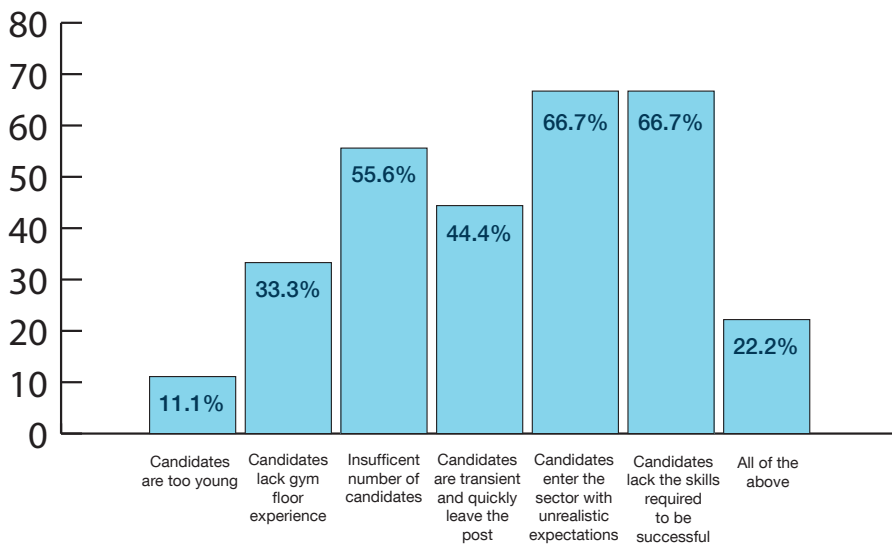


On a scale of 1-5 please outline how easy you find it to identify and recruit high-quality fitness staff (with 5 being 'very easy' and 1 being 'not at all easy')



**78% of employers have to provide additional training to fitness staff in order to ensure that they are 'work ready'**

If you find it difficult to attract high-quality personal trainers and fitness instructors please outline which of the following issues you encounter the most



# Employer feedback

Future Fit Training reached out to a number of respondents of the survey as a follow-up exercise to conduct one-to-one meetings and discuss the issues raised in further detail. The following anonymous feedback from these consultations complements the quantitative data collected previously and it emphasises just how strongly employers feel about the issues in key quotes below.

*“The way we do assessments must change”.*

*“We need to establish a pattern of quality”.*

*“If we want leisure and health to continue to move onwards and upwards, then the level of training must follow suit”.*

*“Commercial skills are not taught – they are lacking”.*

*“It would ‘be helpful’ if assessment criteria were standardised”.*

*“From an employer’s point of view, there’s no recognisable standard [of training assessment]”.*

*“For employers there is ‘no exposure’ to the assessment criteria”.*

*“The assessment criteria should include core skills such as social skills and commercial acumen”.*

*“As a General Manager, you have no idea how well a candidate has been assessed and therefore no idea of the level of skill they are operating at”.*

*“We absolutely want the standard of training to improve; one of the key ways to achieving that is by raising assessment standards”.*

*“It’s ‘nonsensical’ for the sector to have such an unclear training system for front-line roles”*

*“When hiring new staff, we have no way of knowing what a candidate’s key skills are beyond doing comprehensive in-house assessments”.*

*“As an employer, you would expect level 2 or level 3 fitness and personal training qualifications to be the same; there are no benchmarks of the current system”.*

*“Assessment standards can vary from different training providers”.*

*“We run ‘assessment days’ because mandatory qualifications are not always good barometers of skills”.*

*“We would welcome an assured standard when it comes to new qualifications”.*

*“It would be useful to know what has been covered before they come to an interview”.*

*“Having a more standardised approach towards training assessment is a logical step forward for the sector”.*

*“It would be excellent if employers could begin to get a ‘guarantee’ around standards from training providers”.*

# Moving forwards: what can we do to resolve these issues?

The consultation emphasises above all that employers themselves are prepared to support the improvement of workforce development throughout the sector. It is clear employers want to see change in the way training and assessments are carried out and are willing to input into how these changes are made, and also that the majority would be interested to explore the idea of minimum assessment standards for the sector.

Recent changes to OFQUAL (the regulatory body for qualifications, exams and tests in England and vocational qualifications in Northern Ireland) have set out the introduction of the Regulated Qualifications Framework (RQF) to replace the Qualifications and Credit Framework (QCF) rules as of 30th September 2015.<sup>2</sup> According to OFQUAL, the prescriptive design rules that came with the QCF framework, introduced in 2008, were seen as a way of assuring consistency and awarding organisations had to redesign their qualifications to meet the new rules. However, when the QCF was reviewed last year, it was found that the rules placed too much focus on structure and not enough on validity. They were also not flexible enough to meet the variety of needs covered by vocational qualifications.<sup>3</sup> These changes are thus intended to ensure awarding organisations can focus on designing sufficiently valid qualifications rather than having to fit them to a prescribed structure.

This means that the Common Unit Qualifications that have been housed by SkillsActive since 2008 are no longer relevant, with the role and responsibility for designing units being handed over to awarding organisations themselves. The new framework will also bring changes to how the size and level of regulated qualifications are to be described, with the revised approach using only total qualification time and, where appropriate, guided learning hours.

The removal of the QCF and the subsequent increasing independence of awarding bodies threatens to create significant variances within the quality of training across the industry. It is clear the sector faces a pivotal moment for training and assessment standards and workforce development as a whole in order to prevent a 'race to the bottom' type situation from becoming a reality. Awarding organisations need

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***Employers themselves are prepared to support the improvement of workforce development throughout the sector***

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***Minimum assessment boundaries for the sector would remove the inconsistency and lack of confidence that currently surrounds employer's attitudes towards the workforce***

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<sup>2</sup> 'After the QCF: a new qualifications framework', Consultation outcome, Ofqual, 25th March 2015, <https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/after-the-qcf-a-new-qualifications-framework>

<sup>3</sup> 'Regulating for valid vocational qualifications', Jeremy Benson, Ofqual blog, 6th August 2015, <https://ofqual.blog.gov.uk/2015/08/06/regulating-for-valid-vocational-qualifications/>

to be sure they act on the feedback they receive from those who rely on qualifications, such as employers, in ensuring high standards.<sup>4</sup>

Minimum assessment boundaries for the sector would remove the inconsistency and lack of confidence that currently surrounds employers' attitudes towards the workforce. Employers, and in turn consumers, could be confident in trusting the ability of fitness professionals if there was a guarantee, or benchmark, ensuring all of those qualified had been taught to a certain level, for a certain amount of time and with a certain amount of real-life experience. It could also help reduce the need for employers to provide additional training upon entry to new recruits.

Trusted and consistent high standards will also be essential in order for the activity and leisure sector to be seen as a viable partner to the health sector. The role of a well-qualified 'wellbeing workforce' will play a bigger role as physical activity becomes ever more vital in fighting the increasing prevalence of long-term medical conditions, with exercise professionals increasingly required to handle a wide range of conditions with their clients as standard. In order to be able to move forward and operate as a respected partner to the health sector, it is crucial that we are united behind the new, comprehensive and dynamic skills structure that our industry needs.

Minimum assessment standards for other sectors can act as an implementation guide for physical activity. For instance, the practice of cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT); The British Association for Behavioural and Cognitive Psychotherapies (BABCP) has minimum training standards (2012) in place, explicitly and in detail setting out the minimum level of training, experience and practice that therapists are required to achieve in order to work to an agreed standard of competency.

The BABCP sets out strict requirements for learners including, for example, that the minimum number of hours study required in the cognitive/behavioural elements of training is 450 hours, of which 200 hours should be provided directly by recognised trainers. Therapists should have conducted a minimum of 200 hours of supervised assessment and therapy and a minimum of 8 clients will have been assessed and treated by the trainee during the period of training. These cases will cover at least 3 different types of mental health conditions (such as anxiety disorder and depression) and finally a minimum of 3 cases will have been closely supervised.<sup>5</sup>

It is imperative that we all work together quickly in order to agree and set minimum assessment standards, if we are to improve the quality of fitness professionals entering the industry.

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***It is crucial employers, awarding organisations and training providers work together in order to agree some form of minimum assessment standards***

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<sup>4</sup> 'Regulating for valid vocational qualifications', Jeremy Benson, Ofqual blog, 6th August 2015, <https://ofqual.blog.gov.uk/2015/08/06/regulating-for-valid-vocational-qualifications/>

<sup>5</sup> 'BABCP MINIMUM TRAINING STANDARDS For the Practice of Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT), 2012', British Association for Behavioural and Cognitive Psychotherapies <http://www.babcp.com/files/Minimum-training-standards-V6-0413.pdf>







# Summary

The evidence we have gathered in this report suggests that a reform of training and assessments standards is required across the industry in order to improve perceptions and address the existing concerns as highlighted by employers.

## Key findings and conclusions as follows:

Operators feel there has been a decline in the standard of training delivered to key roles throughout the sector

Operators have to spend time and money on ‘assessment days’ and additional training upon entry, as they are not confident of the skills assessed in training courses

Operators have little or no awareness about the disparity in assessment methods from different training providers regarding key job descriptors across the sector

Operators feel that training courses as a whole do not provide exercise professionals with skills which are relevant and needed for a changing sector

Operators would welcome the introduction of minimum assessment standards to ensure a universal benchmark of quality for new entrants to the sector

It is the responsibility of all organisations with an interest and stake in ensuring skills are continuously improved, such as training providers, awarding bodies, government, employers, accreditation providers and trade bodies, to facilitate a discussion whereby skills and workforce development can be improved. They should recommend how this can be done and work with the appropriate bodies to implement this. Furthermore, sport and leisure sector employers need to ensure they are offering sufficient career opportunities and remuneration in order to attract high quality staff. This will require a long-term industrial strategy that views the nature of customers of the future, including dealing with the health agenda, managing complex partnerships, working in community settings and supporting inactive people.

***Reform to training and assessment standards is required across the industry***

It is important to place a large part of responsibility for the development of workforce strategy directly in the hands of major employers. This has been a course of government policy for some time and it is a principle that has been embraced by the major employers in the sector. This is evidenced through their success in driving the Physical Activity Trailblazer, which is leading the review of all apprenticeship standards ahead of the changes due to come into place in 2017. With regards to apprenticeships, the sector has been a major champion of jobs for young people and driven substantial numbers through the programme. However, with the reduction in contributions from local authorities towards the operating costs of local authority leisure, there are major financial pressures coming to bear, not least with other costs of business increasing. With that in mind, the introduction of the proposed new funding requirements for apprenticeships will lead to many employers questioning their investment in this arena as opposed to other learning and development areas.

As a result of the experience of collaborating on workforce development matters in this way, there is substantial interest – led by the biggest employers – to develop an “Industrial Partnership” for the active leisure sector which will see a clear long-term workforce development strategy put in place across all job roles, at all job levels, with a dynamic skills matrix explaining the needs of employers being constantly refreshed. This skills matrix must cover the full breadth of the sector to enable an employee at any level to understand where it stands and what they need to do to progress. It is absolutely critical that the sector has a workforce with the skills fit for the customers of the future as opposed to the needs of the past.

Future Fit is passionate about ensuring the quality training, continued development and ongoing provision of expert Personal Trainers that not only complies with, but exceeds the health and fitness industry’s agreed National Occupational Standards - not just in its own practices but across the industry.

We welcome employer feedback in this consultation to help the sector on a path towards ensuring reliable and respected minimum training and assessment standards for all exercise and fitness professionals at all levels.

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***Future Fit is passionate about ensuring the quality of training, continued development and ongoing provision of expert Personal Trainers that not only complies with, but exceeds the health and fitness industry’s agreed National Occupational Standards - not just in its own practices but across the industry***

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# Methodology

In order to gather the data used throughout this document, Future Fit Training and ukactive developed the annual 'Raising the Bar' Skills Survey in 2014, covering various key indicators for employer satisfaction within the leisure and fitness industry workforce. The survey was sent out through our joint networks in September 2014 and September 2015 to a selection of the largest employers in the sector. The correspondence was directed at Human Resource representatives, senior managers and CEOs at over 30 organisations in order to gather the most robust insight possible.

In follow-up to the initial survey, we also reached out to a selection of operators to conduct one-to-one interview style meetings to discuss the issues raised in further detail and to receive personal anecdotes and insight to sit alongside the quantitative data.

The process was anonymous in order to promote honest feedback from respondents.

A full copy of the survey questions can be obtained upon request from ukactive. For more information please contact [amyfleming@ukactive.org.uk](mailto:amyfleming@ukactive.org.uk).







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