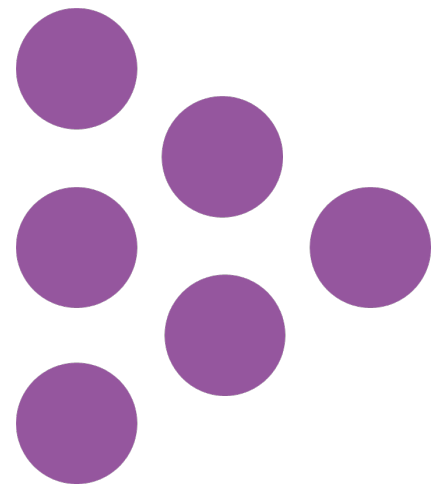


## Report

**An exploratory study of employers' recruitment practices**

**For Gatsby Charitable Foundation**

**National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER)**



# **An exploratory study of employers' recruitment practices**

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## Executive Summary

This report presents the findings of a small-scale study exploring employers' use of qualifications - particularly technical and vocational qualifications - within the recruitment process. Technical and vocational qualifications are practical, work-based qualifications intended to give participants the skills and experience needed for particular occupations and career paths. They typically involve a mix of studying and hands-on practical experience. Examples include T Levels, Tech Levels and Applied General qualifications, Higher National Diplomas (HNDs), Higher National Certificates (HNCs) and Apprenticeships.

The objectives of the study were to:

- quantify the proportion of job postings that list qualifications (particularly technical and vocational qualifications) in their adverts and explore how this varies by industry sector
- understand employers' motivations and decision-making when hiring to fill vacancies and any barriers to the inclusion of technical and vocational qualifications within their recruitment process.

## Methodological approach

As a first step, we analysed vacancy data to understand how frequently qualifications are referenced within job adverts in England, focusing particularly on the use of technical and vocational qualifications. We identified trends in the prevalence of technical and vocational qualifications in job adverts over time and by qualification type, qualification level, region and occupation (including by IFATE occupation route<sup>1</sup>). We then compared these trends to trends in the use of qualifications overall, including academic qualifications. This evidence then informed the subsequent qualitative stage of the study.

In the qualitative phase of the research, we conducted focus groups with 31 employers and completed a rapid review of the existing evidence relating to employers' motivations and decision-making when recruiting, and any barriers to the inclusion of technical and vocational qualifications within their recruitment process.

A degree of caution is needed when interpreting the findings presented in this report due to: the possibility of some double-counting remaining within the quantitative breakdowns; missing job characteristic data where the information is not listed explicitly in the job advert or where the machine learning algorithm is unable to assign an appropriate tag; the sample size of focus group employers; and the limited breadth and depth of the evidence review.

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<sup>1</sup> This was based on the [IFATE occupational maps](#), produced by the Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education, which shows the approved occupations that are related to one or more recognised technical education route.

## Key findings

### **The study found that job adverts rarely included qualifications of any kind.**

Between April 2016 and December 2023, only around eight per cent of job adverts referenced a qualification of any kind and less than five per cent referenced a technical or vocational qualification, with National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs), HNCs and HNDs the most commonly requested technical or vocational qualifications. It was the technical occupations (such as mechanics, manufacturing, construction) and caring/health occupations (such as care workers, social workers) which most often included technical and vocational qualifications in their job adverts. Providing further context on this finding, employers participating in focus groups reported that they tend to primarily request specific qualifications where there is a legal, technical or professional need for them.

The employers taking part in the focus groups reported that they typically did not mention qualifications in their job adverts. This was because they were concerned about reducing their applicant pool and did not want to deter applicants without a specified qualification from applying who would otherwise be excellent candidates. The employers told us that their infrequent use of qualifications in job adverts was not linked to a lack understanding of technical and vocational qualifications, which is reported in the wider evidence, and that they knew where to go if they required further information.

### **Employers typically prioritised looking for evidence of candidates' experience and essential skills during recruitment rather than seeking specific qualifications.**

The focus group employers placed more emphasis on looking for relevant experience and essential employment skills and behaviours during recruitment, rather than seeking specific qualifications. They felt that qualifications alone do not tell you enough about a candidate (e.g. their ability to perform a role) and that this limits their value in the recruitment process. Most of the employers we spoke to were focused on recruiting experienced adults, but they recognised that their approach to recruitment would disadvantage young people looking for their first job.

### **The employers who took part in the focus groups had little appetite to increase their use of qualifications in recruitment.**

The employers we consulted generally did not want to increase their use of qualifications during the recruitment process. However, a small number commented that they might be more likely to require qualifications if more of them included industry experience, or if there was a clear demonstration of the benefits of recruiting candidates with a specific qualification to their business.

It is interesting to note that the findings from this exploratory study do not align with wider evidence which demonstrates the employment outcomes and wage returns that the completion of technical and vocational qualifications can bring.

## Conclusions

This evidence suggests that employers' tendency to omit qualifications from job vacancies is a conscious decision which they do not perceive to be driven by a lack of understanding of qualifications. The priority given to assessing experience and skills during the recruitment process, rather than seeking specific qualifications, creates a significant challenge for young people transitioning into the labour market who may lack the length and depth of prior experience sought. It may also prevent young people, and those who advise and support them, from recognising the value of technical and vocational qualifications for employment outcomes as this is not being signalled to them when job-seeking. Therefore, more work is needed to bridge the gap between employers and young people.

## 1. Introduction

This report presents the findings of a small-scale study exploring employers' use of qualifications - particularly technical and vocational qualifications - within the recruitment process. Technical and vocational qualifications are practical, work-based qualifications intended to give participants the skills and experience needed for particular occupations and career paths. They typically involve a mix of studying and hands-on practical experience. Examples include T Levels, Tech Levels and Applied General qualifications, Higher National Diplomas (HNDs), Higher National Certificates (HNCs) and Apprenticeships.

The study was undertaken by the National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER) on behalf of the Gatsby Charitable Foundation during 2024.

Research has shown that there is generally low understanding and perceived value of technical and vocational qualifications amongst employers, particularly small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) (YouGov, 2019; CIPD, 2022a; Winterbotham *et al.*, 2022; Anwar and Ramaiah, 2023; IFF Research, 2023a). In addition, employers often do not perceive that people achieving technical and vocational qualifications have the technical skills needed by employers in their organisation, or do not have confidence in the vocational qualifications available in their sector (IFF Research, 2023a; YouGov, 2023a). However, despite this low understanding and perceived value, there is evidence of positive employment outcomes and wage returns for candidates who hold these types of qualifications (Pember *et al.*, 2019; Social Mobility Commission, 2023). Within this context, the aim of the study was to explore employers' usage of these qualifications in the recruitment process and consider how any barriers to the inclusion of technical and vocational qualifications might be addressed.

The objectives of the study were to:

- quantify the proportion of job postings that list qualifications (particularly technical and vocational qualifications) in their adverts and explore how this varies by industry sector
- understand employers' motivations and decision-making when hiring to fill vacancies and any barriers to the inclusion of technical and vocational qualifications within their recruitment process.



## 2. Methodology

The study explored four key research questions:

1. What proportion of job adverts reference a technical and vocational qualification and how does this vary, for example by qualification level, length, industry and occupation?
2. What motivates and influences hiring managers' decisions and what are the perceived barriers to referencing technical and vocational qualifications in job adverts?
3. What is the relative importance of the different factors that motivate hiring managers' decisions and what are the different barriers to including technical and vocational qualifications in job adverts?
4. What might motivate and support more employers to include technical and vocational qualifications in their job adverts?

To address these research questions, the study utilised a two-stage design. In the first stage, we conducted a quantitative analysis of secondary data on job adverts. In the second stage, we undertook semi-structured focus groups and a rapid review of the existing evidence. In addition, an advisory group of key stakeholders was formed to guide the study's design and interpretation of findings. The approach taken in each stage of the research is discussed in more detail below.

### 2.1. Quantitative secondary data analysis

The quantitative data analysis explored vacancy data to understand how frequently references to technical and vocational qualifications are included within job adverts in England, how this has changed over time and how this varies by qualification. This evidence informed the subsequent qualitative primary data collection stage of the project.

#### 2.1.1. Data source

The main data source used for the quantitative analysis was data on job adverts on the Adzuna platform. Adzuna is a third-party company which hosts a job board and also aggregates job posting data from other sources online<sup>2</sup>. It then analyses job adverts using machine learning to classify job adverts according to their characteristics.

The data is captured weekly, running from April 2016 to present day for all of the United Kingdom. For the purposes of this analysis we limited our sample to job adverts posted between April 2016 and December 2023. The main focus of our analysis was England, for which about 105 million unique jobs were collated on the platform over this period. The data contains information on jobs' location, occupation (using four-digit SOC 2020 codes), sector, industry, skill, salary, and minimum education level, among other characteristics.

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<sup>2</sup> The platform does not include job data from Indeed, direct advertisers (such as head-hunters) or informally posted adverts.

The characteristics tags for jobs on the platform are derived from information that Adzuna's machine learning algorithm is able to obtain from the job advert itself (for example, location, occupation, skills or industry). The platform does not include any information from any supporting documentation (e.g. pdf 'job packs') that may be posted alongside the main job advert.

This means that there may be some degree of missing data on a job's characteristics where the information is not listed explicitly in the job advert, or where the machine learning algorithm is unable to assign an appropriate tag. For example, where a job does not list a salary on the advert itself, it will not have salary data on the Adzuna platform. Similarly, where a job is listed as 'remote' or where details of the minimum qualification level required is only included in the job pack, it will not have a location or qualification level, respectively.

### 2.1.2. Analytical approach

We analysed unique jobs listed on the Adzuna platform to explore the prevalence of requests for technical and vocational qualifications. Our sample was defined as jobs posted in England only, excluding listings from Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland where the technical and vocational qualifications systems differ significantly from England.

There are some important limitations to the qualifications data available in the Adzuna database. Adzuna base their classification of qualification types and levels on government's published regulated qualifications framework (RQF) levels<sup>3</sup>, with the qualifications requested in any given advert classified based on how they map to these RQF levels. The classification does not include data on the provider issuing the qualification (such as BTEC or City and Guilds) or the subject the qualification is in. Professional certifications and vendor qualifications (such as Prince2 or care certificates) do not map to RQF levels so are classified as skills in the Adzuna dataset and are therefore outside of the agreed scope of this analysis.

The Adzuna database does capture specific, recognised technical and vocational qualifications (such as HNCs, HNDs, Apprenticeships, National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs), Applied Generals, Technical Levels or T Levels) as their own type of qualification. However, key technical/vocational qualifications such as BTECs or City and Guilds are captured across a range of broader types of qualifications within the Adzuna data because different BTEC or City and Guilds qualifications will map to different qualification types under the RQF. For example, a job advert requesting a BTEC National Diploma would be classified as a 'Level 3 National Diploma', whereas an advert requesting a BTEC National Certificate would be classified as a 'Level 3 National Certificate'. The Adzuna platform does not provide sufficient information for us to be able to identify and split out these qualifications in this analysis.

Furthermore, a number of the qualification types used are very broad in nature (such as Level 2 award or Level 3 certificates). While it is highly likely that the qualifications classified in these categories are technical/vocational in nature (rather than academic), it is not possible to verify this as the database does not include data on qualification subject.

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<sup>3</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/what-different-qualification-levels-mean/list-of-qualification-levels>

In light of these limitations, we defined two samples of technical and vocational qualifications.

Our Group 1 sample of technical and vocational qualifications comprised only those recognised technical and vocational qualification which have their own classifications in the Adzuna dataset (such as HNCs, HNDs, Apprenticeships, NVQs, Applied Generals, Technical Levels or T Levels). Therefore, we can have a high degree of confidence that this sample only contains jobs explicitly requesting technical and vocational qualifications.

However, we felt there was value in also including the broader qualification types in the Adzuna dataset (such awards, certifications and diplomas) in our analysis because we know these categories contain key vocational/technical qualifications (such as BTECs and City and Guilds). Therefore, our Group 2 sample of technical and vocational qualifications comprised all qualifications that *may be* technical and vocational in nature to ensure qualifications like BTECs were captured in our analysis. This means Group 2 included all of our Group 1 qualifications as well as the broader types of qualifications like awards, diplomas and certificates and that Group 1 and Group 2 technical and vocational qualifications were therefore not mutually exclusive. Table 2 in Appendix A contains a full list of the qualifications included in each group of technical and vocational qualifications.

In our analysis, we identified trends in the prevalence of technical and vocational qualifications over time and by qualification type, qualification level, region and occupation (including by IFATE occupation route<sup>4</sup>). We then compared these trends to trends in the referencing of qualifications overall, including academic qualifications. Our analysis primarily focused on qualifications defined as Group 1 technical and vocational qualifications as we could be highly confident that all job adverts referencing these qualifications were explicitly seeking candidates holding technical and vocational qualifications. However, we also generated breakdowns for job adverts referencing qualifications defined as Group 2 technical and vocational qualifications. This allowed us to compare and contrast trends based on our Group 1 sample with this broader group of qualifications.

In addition, we explored how the prevalence of specific qualifications has changed over time. NVQs were selected as these have historically been a high-profile vocational qualification but had their regulatory framework withdrawn in 2015 (Ofqual, 2015). This analysis will therefore provide helpful insights into the extent to which references to these qualifications have persisted since the regulatory framework was withdrawn.

### 2.1.3. Caveats

The underlying assumption for our analysis was that Adzuna's machine learning algorithm has correctly interpreted the key information in its database of job adverts. Our ability to verify the algorithm was very limited. However, the developers of the platform have undertaken a considerable amount of quality assurance on the platform over time. We also conducted sense

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<sup>4</sup> This was based on the [IFATE occupational maps](#), produced by the Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education, which shows the approved occupations that are related to one or more recognised technical education route.

checks on the analysis to provide further confidence in the analysis. This should provide a base level of confidence that the key characteristics tags we saw in the data were correct.

It is also important to note that some double-counting may be present in the breakdowns presented in this report for the following reasons:

- some job adverts list multiple qualifications which map back to different education levels and are therefore counted in both categories. For example, if a job requests a level 4 or 5 NVQ, Adzuna would include that job in both the level 4 and level 5 education level data. This results in job adverts being double counted in the qualification type breakdowns and in the education level breakdowns
- some recruiters post job adverts across a large number of different platforms or regions. While Adzuna has corrected for this wherever possible, some duplication may remain and it is not possible to identify where job advertisements were duplicated across different platforms
- some jobs have been posted across December and January of consecutive years, resulting in them being counted across multiple years.

As such, a degree of caution is needed when interpreting these findings.

## **2.2. Qualitative data collection and analysis**

The second stage of the methodology included primary data collection with employers via focus group and a rapid review of the existing evidence. This phase of the study sought to understand employers' motivations and decision-making when recruiting and any barriers to the inclusion of technical and vocational qualifications within their recruitment process.

### **2.2.1. Employer focus groups**

We facilitated four twilight semi-structured focus groups at the end of April/beginning of May 2024, lasting 90 minutes each. The focus groups each comprised of around seven or eight participants, with 31 participants attending in total.

Focus group participants represented a range of:

- sectors (e.g. business/administration, legal, finance, construction, engineering, catering/hospitality, social care, digital and transport/logistics)
- roles (business owners/senior directors, HR/recruitment/office managers, other managers/roles with involvement in recruitment (e.g. team leaders, finance managers)).

Participants came from across England, with London and the South being more heavily represented. Eight participants were based in the South and 15 in London. The remaining participants were based in the Midlands (three participants) and North (five participants).

Around half of the participants came from small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) with between one and 49 employees (15 participants). Five participants represented organisations with

50-100 employees and eleven participants represented organisations with over 100 employees. It is important that organisation size is borne in mind when interpreting the findings. Full details on the characteristics of focus group participants can be found in Appendix A.

After the first round of focus group data collection, the initial intention was to undertake two follow-up focus groups with employers to explore how any barriers to their inclusion of technical and vocational qualifications in job adverts might be overcome. However, the data collected from the employers in the first round of focus groups indicated that there were not any clear barriers to be overcome from employers' perspectives. Therefore, it was decided to replace these remaining focus groups with a rapid review of evidence to explore whether the findings of this small-scale exploratory study were echoed in the wider research.

In addition, it should be noted that, while the focus group questioning attempted to understand employers' use and perceptions of technical and vocational qualifications in the recruitment process, employers did not typically distinguish between these and academic qualifications in their responses. Therefore, the findings primarily discuss employers' usage and perceptions of qualifications more generally, with discussion of technical and vocational qualifications where the data allows.

### 2.2.2. Rapid review of evidence

Following our focus group data collection, we conducted a rapid review of the existing evidence that explores employers' perceptions, awareness and understanding of qualifications, including technical and vocational qualifications. The purpose of the review was to provide important context and additional insight to the findings that emerged from the focus groups.

We adopted an exploratory approach to literature search to give a broad indication of the evidence base. We included evidence published since 2019 covering all qualifications in England, including academic and technical and vocational qualifications at all levels.

We searched for literature using NFER's in-house research database, conducting targeted searches of key organisation websites (such as the Chartered Institute of Personnel Development (CIPD), City & Guilds and Recruitment and Employment Confederation (REC)) and targeted searches of selected journals (such as the Journal of Education and Work and Journal of Education and Training). Finally, we supplemented this literature with evidence recommended by the expert members of our advisory group. The evidence was then appraised and synthesised to provide the evidence presented in this report.

However, this rapid review has several limitations in terms of its breadth and depth. Focusing on more recent studies means that many older studies which may have been relevant have been excluded. The limited scope of the review also means that the findings are based on a relatively small number of studies. The rapid evidence review selected seventeen studies and an additional two studies were recommended by the advisory group. These were all assessed for relevance, with twelve studies considered relevant to the study which resulted in their content being reviewed in more detail.

### 3. How prevalent are qualification requirements within job adverts?

This section explores the extent to which employers reference qualifications within job adverts, with a focus on their inclusion of technical and vocational qualifications. It explores how this has varied over time and by qualification type, qualification level, region and occupation.

#### Key findings from the vacancy analysis

- Only a small minority of job adverts referenced qualifications of any kind.
- The most commonly requested technical and vocational qualifications were NVQs, HNCs and HNDs.
- Among job adverts referencing technical and vocational qualifications, just under half requested Level 4 or 5 technical and vocational qualifications.
- Adverts for jobs in the South East more frequently asked for technical and vocational qualifications than other regions.
- Technical, health and beauty, caring and early years occupations had the highest proportions of job adverts requesting technical and vocational qualifications, typically looking for Level 2 or 3 NVQs.
- Analysis of the job adverts against the IFATE technical education routes shows wide variation in the use of qualifications in job adverts.

#### Only a small minority of job adverts referenced qualifications of any kind

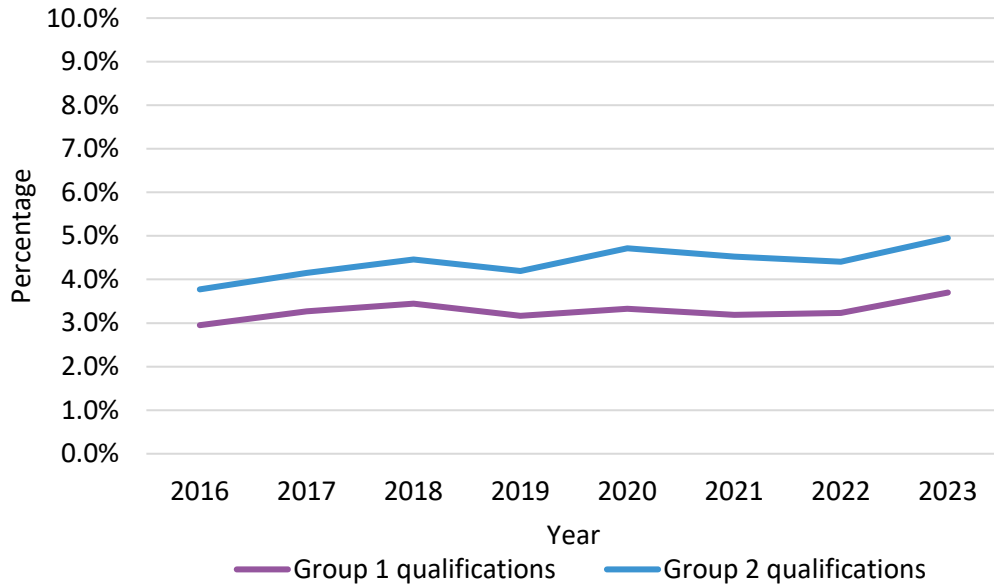
Around eight per cent of unique job listings referenced any kind of qualification, including academic qualifications such as degrees or A-levels. In addition, as shown in Figure 1, only around three per cent of unique jobs listings referenced a Group 1 technical and vocational qualification within their adverts. This increased slightly to around four per cent when we used the more broadly defined sample of Group 2 technical and vocational qualifications<sup>5</sup>. Figure 1 shows that the proportion of job adverts containing a technical or vocational qualification has also remained stable over the last eight years.

Among those job listings that referenced any type of qualification in 2023, around 40 per cent requested a Group 1 technical and vocational qualification. When we repeated this analysis using our broader definition of technical and vocational qualifications, we found that this increased to 53 per cent of adverts requesting Group 2 technical and vocational qualification. This suggests that, while the use of qualifications overall within job adverts is minimal, technical and vocational qualifications do make up a significant proportion of the qualifications that are requested by employers.

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<sup>5</sup> Table 2 in Appendix A contains a full list of the qualifications included in these group of technical and vocational qualifications.

**Figure 1 The proportion of unique job listings referencing qualifications over time**



Note: based on all job adverts active on the Adzuna platform between April 2016 and December 2023. Double counting may occur where jobs were active between December and January of two consecutive years.

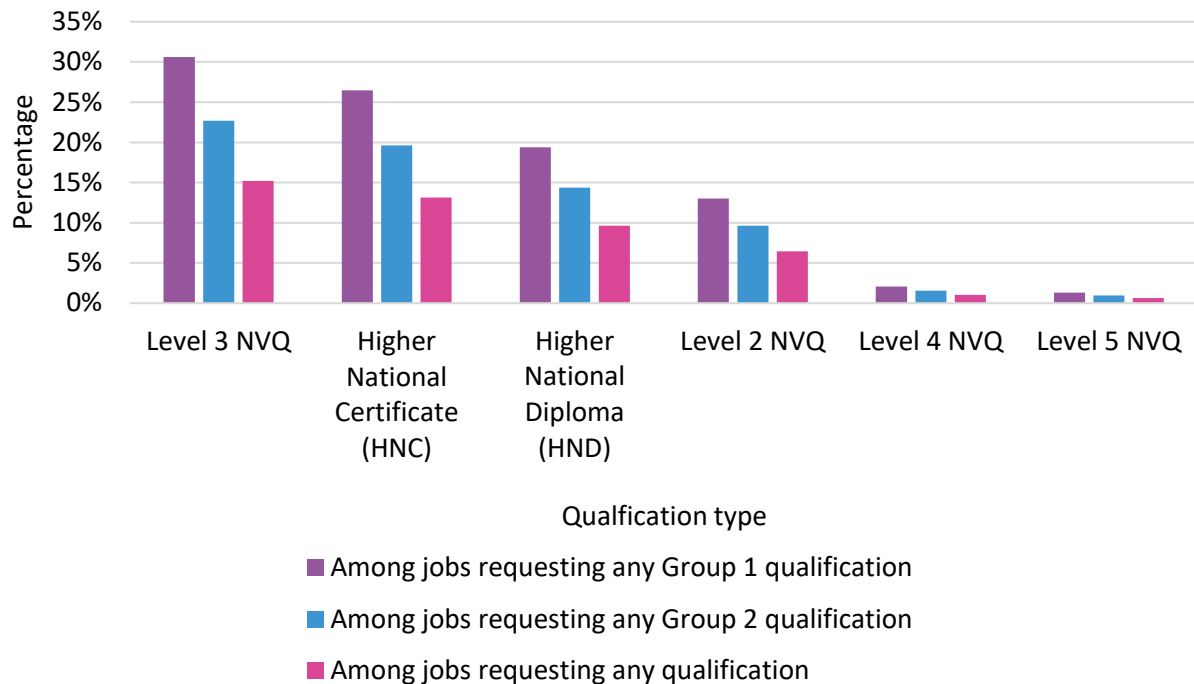
**The most commonly-requested technical and vocational qualifications are NVQs, HNCs and HNDs.**

Figure 2 shows the proportion of job listings in England requesting a qualification by type. NVQs, HNCs and HNDs consistently emerged as the most frequently referenced technical and vocational qualifications across our samples. For example, among jobs requesting any Group 1 qualification between May 2016 and December 2023, around 31 per cent referenced a Level 3 NVQ, 26 per cent referenced an HNC and 19 per cent referenced an HND.

We also found that, in any given year since 2016, more than 50 per cent<sup>6</sup> of all job listings referencing a technical and vocational qualification requested an NVQ qualification. This has not changed significantly since the withdrawal of the regulatory framework for NVQs. One potential explanation for this might be that a considerable share of adverts are aiming to attract a senior, experienced pool of candidates who are likely to hold older qualifications such as NVQs. It is also possible for qualifications to continue to be described as NVQs, despite the changes in frameworks (Ofqual, 2015).

<sup>6</sup> This varied from 53 per cent to 64 per cent between 2016 and 2023.

**Figure 2 Proportion of job adverts in England requesting a technical and vocational qualification by type**



Note: Based on all job adverts active on the Adzuna platform between April 2016 and December 2023.

**Among job adverts referencing technical and vocational qualifications, just under half requested higher level technical and vocational qualifications.**

We found that, among unique job listings asking for a Group 1 technical and vocational qualification, around 45 per cent were seeking Level 4 or 5 qualifications, compared to 36 per cent requesting Level 3 qualifications and an additional 16 per cent requesting Level 2 qualifications. This likely reflects the prevalence of requests for HNC and HND qualifications as well as NVQs discussed above. We also observed this trend when we repeat the analysis using our broader definition of technical and vocational qualifications by looking at job listings asking for Group 2 technical and vocational qualifications. This is shown in Figure 5 in Appendix B.

**Adverts for jobs in the South East more frequently asked for technical and vocational qualifications than other regions.**

Figure 3 presents the proportion of jobs listings in England that requested a qualification by region. It shows that London and the South East were most likely to reference qualifications, with around a fifth of jobs adverts requesting a technical and vocational qualification in the South East. It also shows that, across most regions, the proportion of job adverts specifically referencing technical and vocational qualifications is broadly similar to the proportion referencing any type of qualification. The exception to this is London. Around 25 per cent of adverts which requested any qualification (including academic qualifications) were based in London compared to around 15 per



cent of adverts referencing technical and vocational qualifications. This suggests that employers in London more often look for academic qualifications (as opposed to technical and vocational qualifications) than employers in other regions.

**Figure 3 Proportion of jobs adverts in England requesting a qualification by region**



Note: Based on all job adverts active on the Adzuna platform between April 2016 and December 2023.

**Technical, health and beauty, caring and early years occupations had the highest proportions of job adverts requesting technical and vocational qualifications, typically looking for Level 2 or 3 NVQs.**

Our analysis looked at the prevalence of job adverts that requested Group 1 technical and vocational qualifications by occupation. The ten occupations that most frequently referenced technical and vocational qualifications in job adverts are shown in Table 1. When interpreting this table, it is important to note that the number of job adverts for each of these occupations varied greatly. Overall, Table 1 shows that, unsurprisingly, it was the occupations that are highly technical (for example, mechanics or electricians) or have legal requirements for specific qualifications that most often requested technical and vocational qualifications. In addition, some health and beauty, caring and early years occupations also emerged as having a high incidence of technical and vocational qualification references in their job adverts.

Across these occupations, job adverts typically asked for Level 2 or 3 NVQs. For example, around 84 per cent of job adverts for vehicle technicians, mechanics and electricians referenced a Level 3 NVQ. Similarly, 62 per cent of adverts for care workers and home carers requested a Level 3 NVQ, with an additional 28 per cent requesting a Level 2 NVQ.

**Table 1 The ten occupations with the highest proportions of job adverts that referenced a Group 1 qualification**

Occupation	Total number of job adverts	Proportion of adverts that requested a Group 1 technical or vocational qualification
Non-commissioned officers and other ranks	2,530	93.2%
Beauticians and related occupations	115,242	37.9%
Vehicle technicians, mechanics and electricians	858,125	31.3%
Air-conditioning and refrigeration installers and repairers	78,713	29.4%
Early education and childcare services managers	57,496	29.0%
Electrical and electronics technicians	71,125	27.6%
Precision instrument makers and repairers	22,761	24.4%
Production and process engineers	203,852	24.1%
Senior care workers	104,131	23.9%
Pharmaceutical technicians	34,748	23.9%

**Analysis of the job adverts against the IFATE technical education routes shows wide variation in the use of qualifications in job adverts.**

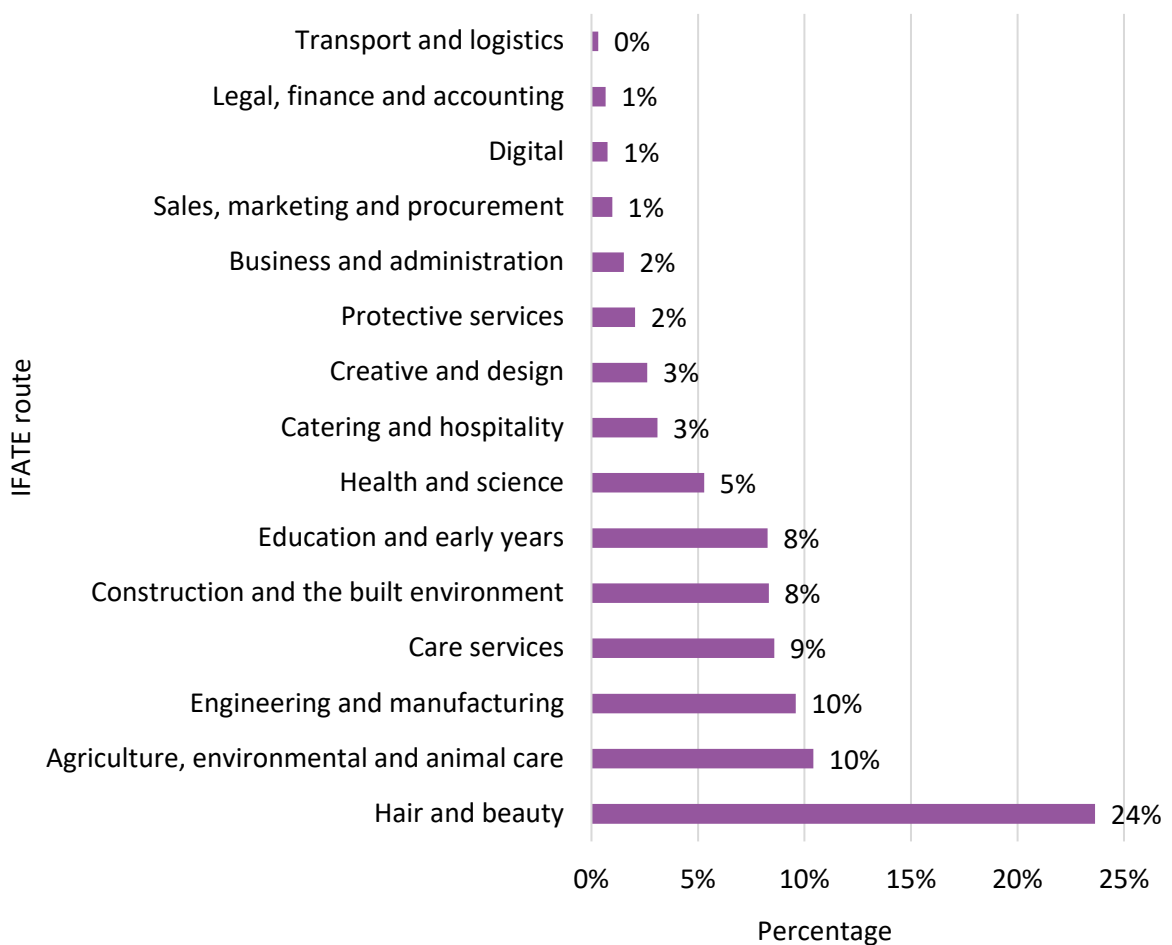
Figure 4 shows the proportion of job adverts within each IFATE route that reference a Group 1 technical or vocational qualification. The IFATE route data was taken from the IFATE occupational maps<sup>7</sup>, produced by the Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education (IFATE), which show the approved occupations that are related to one or more recognised technical education route. We matched these occupational routes to the Adzuna data using four-digit SOC 2020 codes. This then allowed us to calculate the share of job adverts for each IFATE route that mentioned a Group 1 technical or vocational qualification.

The analysis showed wide variation in the extent to which IFATE occupations requested Group 1 technical and vocational qualifications in their job listings. It suggested that, once again, it is the IFATE routes related to technical (e.g. engineering and manufacturing or construction), health and beauty and caring occupations that most often request these qualifications. For example, nearly a

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.instituteforapprenticeships.org/occupational-maps/>

quarter (around 24 per cent) of job adverts in the hair and beauty IFATE route requested a Group 1 technical and vocational qualification, compared to just three per cent of all job adverts. Similarly, around one in ten job adverts in the agriculture, environmental and animal care route, as well as around one in ten adverts in the engineering and manufacturing route, requested these qualifications. This is consistent with the findings discussed previously in relation to Table 1.

**Figure 4 The proportion of job adverts within each IFATE route that reference a Group 1 technical or vocational qualification**



Note: Based on all job adverts active on the Adzuna platform between April 2016 and December 2023.

Overall, the evidence from the quantitative analysis indicates that only a very small minority of employers included technical and vocational qualifications in their job adverts. Those that most often included technical and vocational qualifications in their adverts appeared to typically be technical occupations, such as engineering and manufacturing, or caring and health occupations, such as care services.

## 4. Employers' recruitment practices

This section explores the ways in which the employers participating in focus groups reported that they used qualifications within their recruitment practices. It looks at hiring managers' decisions when formulating job adverts and what they look for during the recruitment process, including the extent to which qualifications are sought. It also considers whether employers perceive any barriers to referencing technical and vocational qualifications in their job adverts and/or recruitment process and what might motivate and support employers to more frequently include technical and vocational qualifications in their job adverts.

As outlined in section 2.2, the findings presented in this section are based on a relatively small sample of employers (31 employers) and primarily reflect the views of SMEs. As such, a degree of caution is needed when interpreting these findings.

### Key findings from the employer focus groups

- The employers who participated in focus groups do not commonly include qualifications in job adverts, often due to concerns around limiting their applicant pool and not wanting to deter high quality candidates from applying.
- These employers' tendency to omit qualifications from job adverts appears to be a conscious decision. They do not link it to a lack of understanding of qualifications, which is consistently referenced in the literature.
- The employers we consulted do not tend to conduct skills audits to inform their recruitment process or materials, including job adverts.
- Employers use recruitment methods which enable them to assess candidates' essential skills, work behaviours and competencies.
- Experience is by far the most important attribute sought by these employers.
- Employers' focus on experience and essential skills in recruitment presents challenges for young people seeking to enter the labour market.
- Employers see limited value in seeking specific qualifications when recruiting. They feel that qualifications do not necessarily produce candidates with the required essential skills and experience to perform a role, which can limit their value in the recruitment process.
- There is little appetite among these employers to increase the use of qualifications in their job adverts or recruitment process.

## 4.1. Recruitment process

### 4.1.1. Decision-making

**Decision-making for recruitment typically follows a standard process but may vary by role type or seniority.**

We asked employers about their decision-making process around developing job adverts and the recruitment process more broadly. Employers reported that the responsibility for recruitment typically sits with senior managers, who then draw on technical, departmental and/or line manager expertise to formulate the appropriate advert and process. Larger organisations are more likely to require sign-off from additional departments such as HR and finance.

Employers also highlighted that they typically repeat a consistent process for each recruitment, though this may vary, particularly in relation to the seniority or technicality of the role. For example, one employer commented:

*It depends on the level that we're hiring at. So, if we're hiring youth workers, engagement workers, casuals or tutors, it would be the decision that would be made at a service manager level. They would ask for my approval and the finance manager's approval and we would sign that off. They would write the job description and interview. If it's a managerial role or a teacher, it would be me that creates the process and then writes the job description and [undertakes] interviews.*

### 4.1.2. Requirement for qualifications within job adverts

**Employers do not commonly include qualifications in job adverts.**

The employers we spoke to reported rarely specifying qualifications within their job adverts, which is consistent with our quantitative analysis presented in section 3. Moreover, a small number reported that they had increasingly moved away from asking for qualifications in recent years. As our quantitative findings indicate that the inclusion of qualifications in job adverts overall has remained relatively stable since 2016, this likely reflects the specific needs and challenges of these employers.

*There are certain roles that require people to have qualifications, and, for other roles, you are looking more at experience or, if it's entry level, you might be willing to take a gamble on someone.*

This finding echoes recent research relating to employers' referencing of degrees in job adverts (Young, 2023). This research found that the number of entry-level jobs referencing degrees had dropped by 31 percentage points over the past five years. According to the findings, in 2023, just 22 per cent of job postings for junior positions directly mentioned degrees compared to 53 per cent in 2018.

The employers consulted generally felt there was limited value in including qualifications in job adverts (see section 4.3 for further discussion of employers' perceptions of the value of qualifications in recruitment). Where employers did include qualifications, they typically included academic qualifications (such as a degree), vendor qualifications/technical certifications (e.g. Microsoft, Google and Cisco) and/or professional accreditations (such as CIMA professional qualifications for accountants and finance roles), rather than technical and vocational qualifications. Some employers were interested in making sure candidates held a minimum level of education such as GCSEs in maths and English and so included this in job adverts in some instances.

Once again, as discussed in section 3, it was the employers in the technical and scientific industries who were most likely to report asking for qualifications in a relevant field (e.g. engineering degree or medical qualification). We also found that employers would ask for qualifications in their job adverts where there was a legal, professional or insurance requirement for employees to hold them (e.g. for finance, social work, teaching, nursing or construction).

*To be honest, I'd only look for qualifications if it's a legal requirement.*

*For us, we are quite specialised in what we do, so we ask for relevant degrees as a minimum. In fact, a Master's degree is preferred, desirable along with other skills as well.*

None of the employers we spoke to had included apprenticeships in a job advert, but employers reported being open to recruiting apprenticeship completers, perceiving apprenticeships to develop desirable experience and skills.

### **Employers expressed concerns that including qualifications in job adverts can deter applicants and limit their applicant pool.**

Employers' reasons for not referencing qualifications in job adverts was that they often limited the pool of applicants, which, for some recruitment cycles, would be highly problematic. This finding reflects a recent recommendation from the CIPD; where competition for well-qualified talent is high, they suggest that employers consider 'removing unnecessary qualifications from job adverts' (CIPD, 2022b). A couple of the employers we spoke to had historically been more interested in qualifications but had relaxed the qualification requirements they were looking for in recent years to try to attract more candidates. Regarding degrees, this included lowering degree class and not specifying a degree subject. Some were recruiting for junior digital positions and their practices align with recent evidence which suggests that employers seeking applicants for entry-level tech roles are removing education experience from requirements to widen the applicant pool (Generation, 2023).

*If we were to put qualifications, in particular in hiring local staff, we wouldn't be able to recruit the volume that we need.*

*I see it [asking for qualifications] as more of a hindrance...because it limits the people that are going to apply. And, very often, you'll miss people who have*

*really good work experience...So, certainly, in my case, experience and professional qualifications are far more important than [academic or technical and vocational] qualifications.*

Employers also highlighted there are typically too many qualifications that may be relevant to a role to include and so they prefer not to mention specific qualifications to avoid putting off suitable applicants who may not hold the specific qualifications mentioned. This is particularly relevant where employers anticipate applications from candidates who were educated or qualified abroad.

*I think we've learned from the past that, if you put out adverts and you're asking for X, Y and Z, it can put people off, or you're kind of not opening it up, because someone may not have all this, you know, the qualifications or the skills you're asking for, but may actually be really suitable for the role.*

Furthermore, some employers highlighted that, where smaller qualifications or accreditations (such as vendor qualifications or technical certificates) are a requirement, they may be willing to put employees through relevant qualifications if needed and so qualifications are not considered essential to the recruitment process. For example, one employer commented:

*We do require qualifications, but it's not a showstopper. We can put our engineers on the courses ourselves.*

These employers would rather identify the right person for the role and pay for them to complete the necessary qualifications or accreditations than specify particular qualifications and exclude high-quality candidates.

**The focus group evidence suggests employers' tendency to omit qualifications from job adverts is often a conscious decision and not driven by the lack of understanding of vocational and technical qualifications reported in the wider evidence base.**

Several studies have indicated that employers typically do not have a good awareness and/or detailed understanding of the range of technical and vocational qualifications available, with awareness and understanding being particularly weak for newer qualifications such as Higher Technical Qualifications (HTQs) and T Levels (Anwar and Ramaiah, 2023; IFF Research, 2023a). For example, a survey of employers undertaken in 2023 (IFF Research, 2023a) found that only two per cent of employers had a good knowledge of all four of the following technical/vocational qualifications: HTQs, T Levels, BTECs and NVQs. Fewer than a quarter of employers had some or good knowledge of newer qualifications such as HTQs or T Levels. Around half of employers agreed that they understood the current vocational education system, understood which vocational qualification offered better knowledge skills and/or workplace behaviours, or had confidence in the vocational qualifications available in their sector.

Moreover, as discussed in section 1, surveys of employers over the past few years have consistently found low awareness and knowledge of T Levels in particular (CIPD, 2022a; Winterbotham *et al.*, 2022; IFF Research, 2023b; YouGov, 2023a). For example, a CIPD survey

found that only 46 per cent of employers surveyed in 2022 had heard of T Levels prior to being surveyed (CIPD, 2022a), only a slight increase from 40 per cent of employers who were surveyed in 2018. Other surveys have also found a poor understanding of T Levels amongst those employers who have heard of them (IFF Research, 2023a; Winterbotham *et al.*, 2022; YouGov, 2023b).

In addition, an employer survey undertaken by Ofqual (YouGov, 2019) found that Applied Generals were less well understood and less trusted qualifications than A-levels and GCSEs. Over half of employers reported that A-levels and GCSEs were well understood (56 per cent and 66 per cent respectively) compared to 14 per cent for Applied Generals. In addition, more than two-thirds felt that A-levels (75 per cent) and GCSEs (70 per cent) were trusted qualifications compared to a quarter reporting this for Applied Generals.

An Ofqual study exploring employers' perceptions of vocational and technical qualifications (VTQs) more specifically (YouGov, 2023a) found that less than a fifth agreed that they were well understood by people. In addition, less than half: reported having a very or quite good understanding of the VTQs in their sectors (43 per cent); agreed that 'the purpose of vocational and technical qualifications is well understood by employers' (38 per cent); and agreed that 'people achieving VTQs have the technical skills needed by employers in my organisation' (34 per cent).

The tendency of the employers we consulted to omit qualifications from job adverts appeared to be a conscious decision aimed at not limiting the applicant pool and was not driven by this widely reported lack of understanding. In addition, employers told us that they knew where to go, or who to ask, for further information about qualifications if they needed it, and gave examples of consulting with industry experts, local colleges/universities and internal colleagues and researching competitors' practices.

#### 4.1.3. Recruitment materials and advertising

##### **Employers do not appear to typically conduct skills audits to inform their recruitment process or materials, including job adverts.**

Employers participating in the focus groups reported that they typically re-used recruitment materials when recruiting for a role (including job adverts, job descriptions and person specifications), making small tweaks and adjustments as required. They noted that they were only likely to create entirely new materials for roles where they did not have any appropriate existing materials or it was a newly-created position. This reflects employers' need to ensure that their recruitment process is as efficient as possible and to avoid 're-inventing the wheel'. Some employers may look at the job adverts of their competitors and tweak their materials in response. Very few of the employers we spoke to utilised any form of skills audit, or equivalent process, to shape each job advert or recruitment cycle.

*We have sort of ever-evolving templates, that we've used over the years, and you learn from each encounter, you learn to edit and modify...get a little bit more concise with your requirements.*



This finding supports evidence from the CIPD (CIPD, 2022b), which suggests that many organisations do not take a strategic and long-term approach to skills and workforce planning. Almost two-thirds of those taking part in the CIPD survey did not look further ahead than 6-12 months when planning and taking action on current and future workforce requirements. This rose to three-quarters for SMEs.

Employers reported that initial advertising for job vacancies often took place via word of mouth (including direct referrals, networking and personal contacts) or online (including recruitment websites, company websites or social media). Some of the employers we spoke to also sought to recruit from within the local community. In addition, employers reported that they might take a tailored approach for more senior roles, or roles perceived to be more challenging to fill. In these instances, they reported often using third-party recruitment agencies or head-hunters. These recruitment methods are consistent with those referenced in the wider literature. For example, an employer skills survey (IFF Research, 2023b) found that the most common recruitment methods were word of mouth or personal recommendations (70 per cent), followed by adverts placed on social media (56 per cent), and adverts placed on the company's own website (51 per cent), and some other paid-for recruitment service (40 per cent).

#### 4.1.4. Recruitment methods

##### **Employers use recruitment methods which enable them to assess candidates' essential skills, work behaviours and competencies.**

The employers we spoke to emphasised the importance of having a recruitment process that allowed them to assess the required essential skills and behaviours (e.g. interpersonal skills, communication skills, team work) and verify the competencies (e.g. technical proficiency) of candidates to help ensure they would succeed in the role if recruited. Whilst some might look for specific qualifications such as degrees when sifting applications, there was wide consensus amongst the employers that qualifications alone do not tell you enough about a candidate, particularly in relation to essential skills and behaviours.

There was a general consensus amongst the employers consulted with regards to their preferred recruitment methods. Most reported that they interviewed candidates and also conducted other interactive assessment activities. They gave a range of examples of activities which enabled them to assess candidates' skills, competencies and prior experience. These included: trial sessions/shifts, setting work-related scenarios, presentations/demonstrations, aptitude or technical/trade tests, literacy tests, practical tests, and reviewing candidates' portfolios. Some examples of the selection approaches taken by employers are provided in the quotations below.

*We recruited last year a comms person and, when we did the interview process at the second stage, we asked them to do a sort of a critical review of our website and present it to us.*

*[They] will have an interview and, if we like the person and they have the experience, they'll come in for a testing session where we will give them the Microsoft packages to see how proficient they are.*

The recruitment methods reported by employers in the focus groups echoed those outlined in CIPD's Resourcing and talent planning report (CIPD, 2022b). These include: investigating a candidate's previous work history/experience; some form of interview (e.g. competency based or use of CVs/application forms, with values-based and strength-based interviews being slightly less predominant); consideration of educational qualifications; and some form of test or assessment.

We also asked employers about the extent to which they adapted their recruitment process when recruiting young applicants (e.g. 16-19-year-olds leaving education and training). Many of the employers we spoke to did not tend to recruit candidates within this age group as they were usually looking for more experienced candidates. Despite this, employers suggested that their recruitment approaches and assessments for younger applicants e.g. aged 16-21 tended to be more focused on assessing candidates' attitude and if they would fit into the team. They commented that their job adverts might use more targeted language to attract these younger candidates.

## **4.2. What are employers looking for when recruiting?**

### **Experience is by far the most important attribute sought by employers.**

We asked employers about what they are looking for in the recruitment process and what they perceived as being of most value. Mirroring what they said when asked about recruitment methods, they emphasised the importance of an individual's experience and employment history, essential skills and work behaviours and attitudes, rather than the specific qualifications they held. Employers perceived this emphasis on experience as key to understanding whether a candidate was likely to be successful in the role, and whether they would fit into the culture and ethos of the organisation.

*I think, for us, we don't again focus too much on the qualifications...It's about the soft skills. It's about the experience as opposed to somebody having a bit of paper. That's really important to us.*

*I will just purely be talking about the background experience I'm looking for and I would like them to cite two or three aspects of what they've done that fulfils my criteria which would be entirely experience-led. Not academic or educationally-led.*

*If we want somebody to be a project director, we may ask for a project management qualification. It would be desirable. But, again, it depends. If somebody has the experience over a qualification, then we would also consider that.*

However, employers did note that what they look for is driven by the nature of the role and what it entails. They commented that the focus might shift towards qualifications and skills for more technical roles and away from interpersonal skills if these were less important for the role. For example, one employer commented:

*So, if it's somebody that's going to just be in a tech office programming all day, they don't need to fit as well culturally for us as a company. Whereas, if somebody is going to be on tech support, they're going to be dealing with different people...we want them to have more of a cultural fit with the company.*

These findings echo recent evidence from an employer survey which found that the most relevant factor when recruiting was work experience, as reported by 62 per cent of employers (IFF Research, 2023b). They also reflect evidence reporting a decrease in the importance employers place on candidates having relevant vocational qualifications (IFF Research, 2023b). This is despite evidence demonstrating the employment outcomes and wage returns that technical and vocational qualifications can bring to candidates and employers (Pember *et al.*, 2019; Social Mobility Commission, 2023). The findings also mirror evidence that relevant work experience is seen as essential by many employers when thinking about recruiting to their organisation and is perceived to be equally as important as having a degree or equivalent for professional and managerial roles (YouGov, 2023a).

### **Employers' focus on experience and essential skills in recruitment presents challenges for young people seeking to enter the labour market.**

Employers' emphasis on seeking candidates with prior experience in the recruitment process presents challenges for young people given their comparative lack of experience. The employers we spoke in this study reported rarely recruiting young people as they were looking for experience (rather than offering entry-level roles). In addition, their assessment of essential skills and behaviours can put young people at a disadvantage as they have had little time or opportunity to develop these. Amongst the employers we spoke to, there appeared to be a general lack of consideration and adaptation in the recruitment process to accommodate young people, though these employers broadly recognised that their approach to recruitment may disadvantage young people looking for their first job.

*Organisations are not really that committed to employing like young people. You know, we've not got a real, you know, set up of, of how we do that, I don't think.*

Employers' preference for older recruits with relevant skills and experience reflects existing evidence (IFF Research, 2023b), with larger establishments being much more likely to recruit education leavers. A CIPD study (CIPD, 2022a) suggested that this preference seems to be connected to employers' perceptions that young people, particularly 16-year-old and 17- or 18-year-old school leavers, are poorly prepared for work, with over half of employers reporting them to be fairly poorly or poorly prepared for work. This is driven by perceptions that young people lack experience of the working world/life experience, have poor attitudes or lack motivation, and lack

required employability or ‘soft’ skills and common sense. The CIPD study noted a growing recognition that the development of essential or ‘employability’ skills (such as teamwork, presenting and problem-solving) are crucial in preparing young people to make the transition from the classroom to the workplace, and to supporting adults to progress and adapt to changing employment opportunities.

### **4.3. Employers’ perceptions of the value of qualifications**

#### **Employers see limited value in seeking specific qualifications when recruiting.**

When asked about their perceptions of the value of qualifications when recruiting, employers participating in the focus groups consistently highlighted that asking for specific qualifications does not necessarily produce the candidates they need. They felt that qualifications do not tell you enough about a candidate (e.g. their essential skills and prior experience) and so this limits their value in the recruitment process.

*High qualifications doesn't necessarily mean the better person.*

*Someone may not have all this, you know, the qualifications you are looking for, but may actually be really suitable for the role. So, I feel like we're limiting ourselves to who we are kind of appealing to [if we ask for qualifications]. So, yeah, we're a lot more open now.*

*I think academically clever doesn't always correspond with being commercially clever.*

Employers also recognised that knowledge and skills can be acquired through work experience, not just formal education/training and that, in some sectors/roles, it is becoming increasingly common for candidates to be self-taught. For example, one employer recruiting for digital roles reported:

*I think, over the last 20 years or so, ...there's been a trend, I think noticeable trends, towards more people being like self-taught almost in terms of tech skills and programming and coding and, by self-taught, I mean they've maybe learned from online courses...Online learning is becoming more and more prevalent...But more and more over time...we've just moved away from asking for qualifications.*

While the employers we spoke to tended to value experience and essential skills far more highly than candidates holding specific qualifications, it should be noted that qualifications may underpin how candidates were able to initially obtain their relevant experience (e.g. when they first entered the labour market). Similarly, candidates might need to hold specific qualifications to obtain subsequent professional accreditations, which employers do consider essential.

Some employers commented that qualifications, particularly professional qualifications (such as CIM for marketing, CIPD for HR, ITIL for IT service management), can show commitment to a career, which is appealing to employers but not always essential.

**There is little appetite among employers to increase the use of qualifications in their job adverts or recruitment process.**

The broad consensus amongst the employers we spoke to was that they were not interested in increasing their use of qualifications when recruiting because they did not think this would be beneficial and could limit their applicant pool.

However, a small number of employers commented that they might be more likely to require qualifications if more of them included industry experience, or if there was a clear demonstration of the benefits of recruiting candidates with a specific qualification to their business.

*Because we're all saying about the experience is more important than qualifications. So, maybe, if the qualifications included the industry experience, we would then ask for those qualifications because we know they're not just coming with a piece of paper, they're coming with experience and the piece of paper.*

*So, it would be good if there was some sort of way of indicating how it could sort of add in these skills and upskill your business and where you can see how it can impact your bottom line.*

This suggests that more could be done to demonstrate the benefits specific qualifications would bring to employers, highlighting the relevant knowledge and skills learners gain, as well as industry experience where this is an integral part, such as in T Levels. For example, it may be helpful to some employers for the skills and practical experience that specific technical and vocational qualifications develop to be mapped out so that they can use this knowledge when assessing the skills of job applicants, particularly recent education leavers.

## 5. Summary

This study demonstrates that qualifications of all types, including technical and vocational qualifications, are not widely used in job adverts by employers. Less than a tenth of job adverts on the Adzuna platform reference a qualification of any kind and less than one in twenty reference a technical or vocational qualification. It is the technical occupations (such as mechanics, manufacturing, construction) and caring/health occupations (such as care workers, social workers) which most often include technical and vocational qualifications in their job adverts.

Mirroring evidence from the Adzuna analysis, the employers participating in the focus groups reported that they typically did not include qualifications in their job adverts. They often attributed this to not wanting to reduce their applicant pool or not wanting to deter applicants without specific qualifications from applying who would otherwise be excellent candidates. Their priority in the recruitment process more broadly was on assessing candidates' experience and essential skills rather than seeking specific qualifications. This was linked to a perception that qualifications alone do not tell you enough about a candidate (e.g. their essential skills and experience to perform a role) and that this can limit their value in the recruitment process. Most of the employers we spoke to were focused on recruiting experienced adults, but they recognised that their approach to recruitment would disadvantage young people looking for their first job.

The employers in this study were not concerned about their understanding of qualifications and had little appetite to increase their use of qualifications in the recruitment process. However, the wider evidence suggests that employers' understanding of technical and vocational qualifications is generally poor and this is likely to prevent them understanding the potential benefit of recruiting candidates with these qualifications. Only a minority of employers indicated that they may benefit from a better understanding of the skills developed by specific qualifications and how recruiting candidates with particular qualifications might benefit their organisation.

The priority given to assessing experience and skills during the recruitment process, rather than seeking specific qualifications, creates a significant challenge for young people transitioning into the labour market who may lack the length and depth of prior experience sought. It may also prevent young people, and those who advise and support them, from recognising the value of technical and vocational qualifications for employment outcomes as this is not being signalled to them when job-seeking. Therefore, more work is needed to bridge the gap between employers and young people.

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## Appendix A: Additional methodological detail

This appendix presents additional detail on the methodology used in this study. Table 2 presents the technical and vocational qualifications that form the Group 1 and Group 2 samples of qualifications used in this analysis.

**Table 2 The qualifications included in each of the groups of technical and vocational qualifications**

	Qualifications	
Group 1	Advanced Apprenticeship (Level 3 Apprenticeship)	Level 1 NVQ
	Applied General	Level 2 NVQ
	Degree Apprenticeship (Level 6/7 Apprenticeship)	Level 3 NVQ
	Foundation Degree	Level 4 NVQ
	Higher Apprenticeship (Level 4/5/6/7 Apprenticeship)	Level 5 NVQ
	Higher National Certificate (HNC)	Level 6 NVQ
	Higher National Diploma (HND)	Level 7 NVQ
	Intermediate Apprenticeship	T Level
		Tech Level
Group 2	Advanced Apprenticeship (Level 3 Apprenticeship)	Level 3 NVQ
	Applied General	Level 4 Award
	Certificate of Higher Education (CertHE)	Level 4 Certificate
	Degree Apprenticeship (Level 6/7 Apprenticeship)	Level 4 Diploma
	First Certificate	Level 4 NVQ
	Foundation Degree	Level 5 Award
	Higher Apprenticeship (Level 4/5/6/7 Apprenticeship)	Level 5 Certificate
	Higher National Certificate (HNC)	Level 5 Diploma
	Higher National Diploma (HND)	Level 5 NVQ
	Intermediate Apprenticeship	Level 6 Award
	Level 1 Award	Level 6 Award
	Level 1 Certificate	Level 6 Diploma
	Level 1 Diploma	Level 6 NVQ

Level 1 NVQ	Level 7 Award
Level 2 Award	Level 7 Certificate
Level 2 Certificate	Level 7 Diploma
Level 2 Diploma	Level 7 NVQ
Level 2 National Certificate	SCQF Level 10 Award
Level 2 NVQ	SCQF Level 10 Certificate
Level 3 Award	SCQF Level 12 Diploma
Level 3 Certificate	SCQF Level 9 Certificate
Level 3 Diploma	SCQF Level 9 Diploma
Level 3 National Certificate	T Level
Level 3 National Diploma	Tech Level

Tables 3 to 6 present the key characteristics of the focus group participants: region in which they are based<sup>8</sup>, the industry they represent, the size of their employer and the type of job role the participant holds.

**Table 3 Region in which focus group participants are based**

Participation location	Number of participants
East Midlands	1
London	15
North West England	4
North East England	0
Scotland	1
South East England	6
South West England	2
West Midlands	2

<sup>8</sup> This refers to the participant's working location. The employer may be based elsewhere.

**Table 4 Industries represented by focus group participants**

<b>Industry</b>	<b>Number of participants</b>
Care & Social Services	2
Catering & Hospitality	4
Construction	5
Consulting / Business / Administration	5
Digital / IT Sector	2
Education & Early Years	1
Engineering	1
Finance & Accounting	1
Hair & Beauty	1
Health & Science	1
Legal	1
Manufacturing	2
Sales	2
Transport & Logistics	3

**Table 5 Size of employer represented by focus group participants**

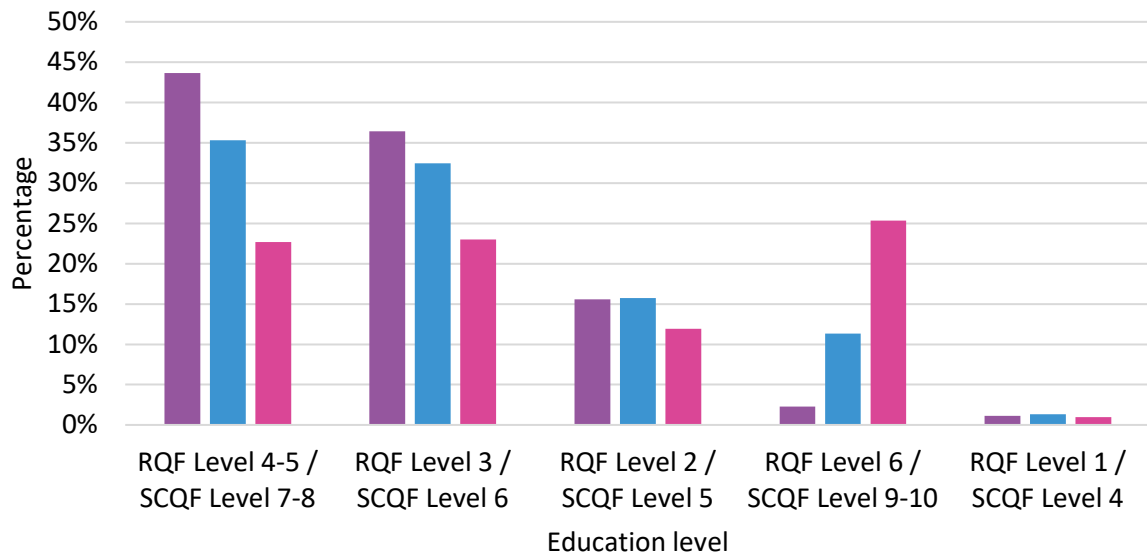
<b>Number of employees</b>	<b>Number of participants</b>
1-49 employees	15
50-100 employees	5
More than 100 employees	11

**Table 6 Type of job role held by focus group participants**

<b>Job role</b>	<b>Number of participants</b>
Business owner/Director	16
Manager (e.g. team leader, project manager)	8
Recruitment/HR	7

## Appendix B: Additional figure

**Figure 5 The proportion of job adverts in England requesting a qualification by education level**



- Among jobs requesting any Group 1 qualification
- Among jobs requesting any Group 2 qualification
- Among jobs requesting any qualification

Note: Based on all job adverts active on the Adzuna platform between April 2016 and December 2023.

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