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# *Championing difference for a better workforce*

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*Increasing diversity and inclusion in the WorldSkills UK Competitions*

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## *Executive Summary*



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**TSIP** | The Social Innovation Partnership

  
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# Executive Summary

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***“[Diversity and inclusion has] the greatest of values – to strive to be open for all; for each to have the chance; for each to try to be the best version of themselves that is possible... at the end of the day we are all people”***

***- 2018 competitor***

Everyone faces barriers to progress throughout their lives. For many, these barriers take the shape of discrimination, disability and disadvantage – barriers that manifest early and compound. Work on issues of social mobility, equity, diversity and inclusion is vital so that these barriers can be overcome. Opportunities for individuals to engage and to thrive need to be equalised in a proactive way to ensure that all are given the chance to succeed.

Like many organisations and competition organising bodies, WorldSkills UK and its partners recognise that there are barriers in its Skills Competition programme – barriers that both hinder diverse young people from taking part and disadvantage them during the Skills Competitions programme and beyond. WorldSkills UK is determined to address these challenges so that the UK’s full spectrum of talent has the opportunity to participate and benefit from the experience.

This report sets out how WorldSkills UK can help lead the charge in progressing diversity and inclusion across the technical skills sector, and the Skills Competitions that it runs. Both the summary and report that follow are in two sections: an introduction which comprises the context, methodology and data that was collected during the research stage of the project and a focus areas section which builds on the barriers identified during the research to five areas for WorldSkills UK to focus on, supported by tangible recommendations.

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# Introduction

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## WorldSkills UK Competitions

WorldSkills UK is one of the leading national programmes preparing young people with the critical skills needed for the jobs of today and tomorrow. Young people exit the Skills Competitions programme armed with the soft and hard skills that make them invaluable to employers. Given this important role in developing and championing the UK and global workforce, WorldSkills UK wants to attract, develop, mentor, and sponsor the UK's most diverse and best young talent – improving not just the quality and diversity of its competitors and the inclusivity of the Skills Competitions, but also the economy (driving innovation, profitability,

productivity and competitiveness) and society more broadly.<sup>1</sup>

Key to the operation of Skills Competitions are 25 Competition Organising Partners (COPs), who deliver the national competition cycle, and around 40 Training Managers and Performance Coaches who prepare competitors for international competition. A wider network of employers, colleges and training providers register young people for competitions and / or contribute funds, materials, other resources or time. This network is vital to the effective delivery of WorldSkills UK's objectives and its sustainability.

**Young people exit the Skills Competitions programme armed with the soft and hard skills that make them invaluable to employers.**

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## Research aims and methodology

This commitment to diversity and inclusion led WorldSkills UK to commission The Social Innovation Partnership (TSIP) to undertake an independent review of its Skills Competitions programme. WorldSkills UK's goal was to use this independent research to inform, influence and drive positive change in its Skills Competitions programme – focusing primarily on social mobility, BAME<sup>i</sup>, women in Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM)/ Information and Communications Technology (ICT)/ Construction, LGBT+, individuals with SEN, and those from more deprived areas across the UK.

This report is based on:

- a review of existing practice and evidence as it relates to diversity and inclusion in WorldSkills UK's Competitions;
- **3,021 registrants'** data across the Skills Competitions programme;
- the voices and experiences of **697 stakeholders** (competitors, Skills Champions, teachers/trainers, Principals, employers, Competition Organising Partners, Judges, Training Managers, and Performance Coaches);
- the insights from **four literature reviews** on how similar programmes and competitions address social mobility, diversity and inclusion

<sup>i</sup> Black, Asian and Minority Ethnicities – whilst we appreciate that the grouping of these ethnicities may be in of itself damaging, there were insufficient data to analyse the experiences of the independent groups.

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## What we mean by diversity and inclusion

For the purposes of this research diversity is interpreted in terms of the extent to which participants and partners are representative of the wider populations from which they are drawn, and inclusion in terms of the extent to which diverse individuals are recognised, made to feel welcome and appreciated. Diversity and inclusion have been analysed primarily through the lenses of gender, ethnicity, LGBT+, multiple deprivation levels, and national region.

Patterns seen within the Skills Competitions cycle to some extent reflect and are caused by broader trends – especially within the colleges, training providers and employers from which competitors are drawn. But WorldSkills UK also has the opportunity, by increasing diversity within the Skills Competitions, to contribute to a virtuous circle linking increased diversity with reduced stereotypes and increased participation in the technical skills sector.

**Promoting diversity and inclusion isn't just the right thing to do, there is increasing evidence that it makes good business sense.**

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## The importance of diversity and inclusion

Promoting diversity and inclusion isn't just the right thing to do, there is increasing evidence that it makes good business sense. As the demand for a more diverse workforce increases,

more evidence is emerging showing the true business case for inclusive practice: that greater diversity increases the likelihood of increased innovation, revenue, and productivity.<sup>2</sup>

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## The state of diversity across the nations

The United Kingdom is home to over 66 million people characterised by different ages, ethnicities, genders, sexualities, abilities, religions and socio-economic backgrounds.<sup>3</sup> For example, 1 in 7 people living in England come from an ethnic minority background;<sup>4</sup> 2% of people living in Wales identify as lesbian, gay or bisexual (data on trans and transgender populations are not

provided);<sup>5</sup> and among working-age adults specifically, around 18% of the UK identifies as having a disability.<sup>6</sup> The potential for the UK workforce to boast its diversity is undeniable. Yet, despite the diversity of the population, industries have had limited success ensuring these differences are included in their workforce.

**Females  
comprise  
58% of all  
FE learners,  
but only 7.8%  
are apprentices  
in Engineering  
and  
Manufacturing  
Technologies.**

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## Diversity and inclusion in the technical skills and FE sector: the pipeline of competitors

Our analysis looked at the 2.2million students aged 16-18 across colleges across the four nations of the UK in 2017-18<sup>7</sup> and showed that ethnic minorities (i.e. those not identifying as White British) make up 24%, 17% have a learning disability or difficulty and 17% claimed free school meals at age 15. Overall, 36% of FE learners live in an area in the most deprived Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) quintile, and 21% who paid for their course stated that it was difficult for them to meet the cost.<sup>8</sup> Females comprise 58% of all FE learners, but only 7.8% are apprentices in Engineering and Manufacturing Technologies.<sup>9</sup> According to a recent analysis report, only 7% of Principals in the UK are BAME – and three out of the nine regions in England have no BAME Principals whatsoever.<sup>10</sup>

Our analysis also looks at the additional 77,500 being educated through apprenticeships<sup>11</sup>, and those in full-time and part-time employment in the technical skills sector. We noted that BAME young people are underrepresented in construction, IT and engineering, making up 25% of apprenticeship applicants, but only 10% of actual apprentices.<sup>12</sup> Underrepresentation is even more prominent for people from Asian backgrounds specifically, who make up only 4.3% of apprentices compared to 8% of the population.<sup>13</sup> When it comes to gender, as of 2018 only 7.4% of engineering apprenticeships were taken up by women and girls, and only 12.3% of all engineers in the UK were female.<sup>14</sup>

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## Diversity and inclusion in WorldSkills UK Competitions

While diversity clearly exists in the technical education sector, albeit with room for improvement, it is not filtering through sufficiently into WorldSkills UK Competitions. In 2018, 90% of WorldSkills UK competitors were White, 67% were male and only 5% identified themselves as having a disability or learning difficulty. The findings confirm that WorldSkills UK competitors are not fully representative of young people in the UK: they are overly weighted toward White British men without disability or special educational need (SEN).

Based on this data our focus areas and recommendations come from the perspective of:

- Women in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM)
- Black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) competitors
- Competitors with special educational needs (SEN)
- Competitors who are members of the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender plus (LGBT+) community (not represented below, as this information was not collected by WorldSkills UK in 2018)
- Competitors from disadvantaged backgrounds (as per Index of Multiple Deprivation [IMD] measures)

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# Focus areas for WorldSkills UK

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## This section sets out five key focus areas for WorldSkills UK to act on:

1. Reaching and appealing to diverse individuals
2. Tackling stereotypes and preconceptions
3. Improving competitor support and reduce barriers to entry
4. Increasing and appreciating diversity and inclusion within WorldSkills UK, the Skills Competitions and its partners
5. Forming a clear vision and narrative around diversity and inclusion across WorldSkills UK and its partners

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## Each focus area responds to the barriers that were uncovered in the analysis, listed below:

- The **registration process** means that tutors, trainers and employers are in a position of control over who is registered for the Skills Competitions – which is open to bias as well as good practice
- Such biases are problematic when students and apprentices are not otherwise aware of the Skills Competitions, and able to advocate for themselves to their tutors and employers; currently, **limited awareness of the WorldSkills UK opportunities** serves as a barrier
- Competitors currently **lack diverse role models within the WorldSkills UK Competition** professionals, which many have said they would have valued
- Competitors also reflected a **lack of diverse role models in the wider technical skills sector**, which can limit social mobility for those who do not see themselves represented
- Competitors can face **social and financial barriers** to participation, as well as during the Skills Competitions, such as lack of confidence, anxiety, lack of support from family, college or employer, or inability to afford the extra time to train
- The **language and narrative** around the Skills Competitions relating to ‘excellence’ and ‘winning’ can be a barrier to those who are not drawn to competitions, in particular for women, compared with language used around developing skills

At the end of each focus area section, we then provide recommendations for how WorldSkills UK can take steps to address these barriers. Pursuing these recommendations will take human and financial resources which may currently be outside the constraints of WorldSkills UK’s funding, and which will likely require additional funding to support. Although these are aimed primarily at WorldSkills UK, they are also applicable as recommendations which other stakeholders could apply to their own organisations.

# Understanding the data behind the five focus areas: key demographics and survey responses around the 2018 WorldSkills UK Competitions

Skills Competition  
Judges were:

8%

BAME

10%

LGBT

20%

Female

4% with  
disability  
or SEN

98%

of competitors

had heard about the Skills  
Competitions through their  
tutor, trainer or employer

77%

of BAME Principals,  
tutors, training providers  
and employers agree that  
diversity is a current issue  
in the technical skills sector;  
compared with only

32%

of their White British peers

60%

of tutors and employers  
did not agree that their  
most skilled students were  
always able or willing  
to take part, suggesting  
that there are practical or  
motivational barriers to  
attracting the most skilled  
students to participate

23%

of tutors and trainers  
agreed that students'  
financial difficulties can  
prevent them from being  
able to participate

Surveyed Training  
Managers were:

7%

BAME

7%

LGBT

14%

Female

0% with  
disability  
or SEN



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## 1. Reaching and appealing to diverse individuals

WorldSkills UK has the opportunity to increase diversity by addressing the potential for bias in the registration process: both by tapping into the full pool of individuals in the currently participating organisations, and by expanding its reach to more diverse areas of the UK, and into organisations not currently involved. Currently, 87% of competitors are directly registered by their FE colleges, employers, or other independent training providers (ITPs),<sup>15</sup> and 98% of competitors had heard about the Skills Competitions from their tutor or employer (as opposed to from WorldSkills UK directly or past competitors and peers).

There is a real risk with colleges, employers and training providers having this much influence over who hears about and registers in the Skills Competitions. Although there are many success stories of tutors' and employers' best efforts, when it comes to registering competitors, organisations may be operating on inconsistent or subjective selection

requirements. This means there is room for bias to impact decision-making.

There is therefore a case for **positive action** in making more people aware of the Skills Competitions. FE Colleges produced 78% of the 2018 competitors but many competitors came from the same colleges and institutions and are often not located in areas with diverse populations. Of the 14 Competition Organising Partners interviewed, six voiced the need for more local and bespoke engagement (competitions qualifiers, roadshows) in diverse regions.

As such, WorldSkills UK can help address participation barriers which exist both to colleges, training organisations and companies as a whole, and to the students and apprentices within them (see Figure 14).

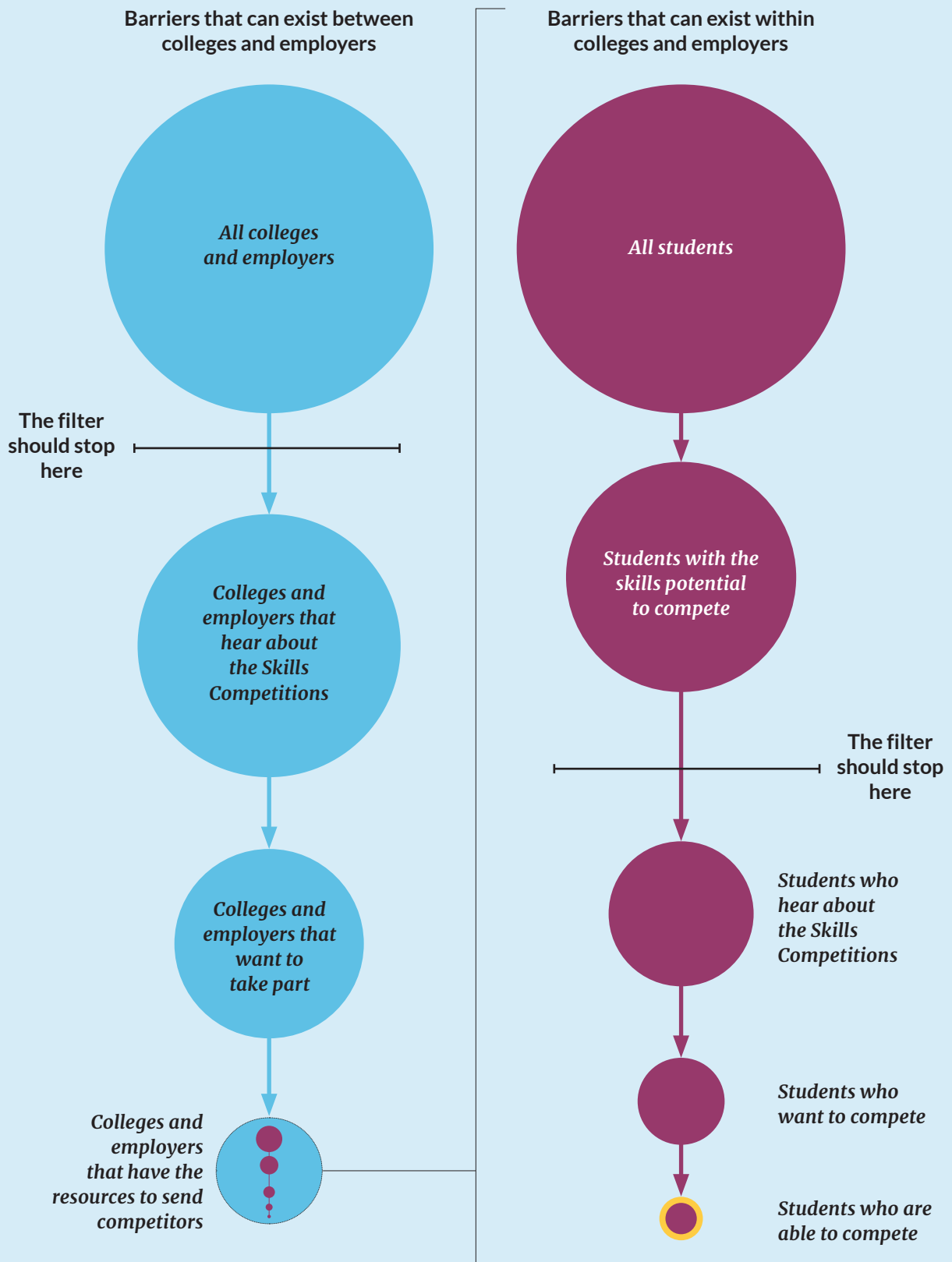
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## 2. Tackling stereotypes and preconceptions

One of the major means to promote and encourage diverse participation and access, is to contribute towards dismantling societal stereotypes around 'traditional' roles in skilled trades: i.e., perceptions of who is 'typical' within these skilled trades, which can carry outdated associations with White British men. Our research shows that a barrier to diverse competitors is the perceived 'second class' status of apprenticeships and technical skills or vocations. 36% of COPs queried believe that the reason certain skill areas are more diverse than others are a result of long-held stereotypes that permeate British culture and schooling.

These perspectives were echoed by Principals, tutors, and apprentice trainers, 85% of whom spoke about the difficulties they face in encouraging non-stereotypical participation in different skill areas. 23% mentioned having difficulty attracting BAME students to their skill sectors, but the majority (85%) mentioned gender differences, particularly around recruiting women to STEM skills or men to beauty or social care.

**Figure 14** (from the main report) Conceptual diagram highlighting the barriers that organisations, and the learners within them, can face producing a filtering effect of who ultimately competes in the Skills Competitions



**...more  
could be  
done to get  
WorldSkills  
UK's positive  
and diverse  
branding  
out to more  
people.**

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### **3. Improving competitor support and reducing barriers to entry**

Once competitors succeed nationally and prepare for international competitions, Training Managers, individual Performance Coaches and some financial support are provided. Yet this support is often inconsistent based on the location or skill focus and can be improved when it comes to the financial, emotional and wellbeing needs of competitors. The majority of 2018 competitors surveyed strongly agreed that they felt supported by their tutors, teachers, employers and family. However, registrants, tutors, trainers, and Competition Organising Partners (COPs) in our surveys and interviews all recognised the inconsistent support structures across the various stages of

the Skills Competition Programme. In particular, the research highlighted the impact of financial barriers – from initial engagement with the Skills Competitions through to the later stages of competing.

We also present the case for taking a hard look at the language used through the Skills Competition programme. Although WorldSkills UK may not be able to directly influence public perception, it can control the language that it uses to promote its work and ambitions. For instance, the terms ‘competition’ and ‘excellence’, and the focus on ‘medalling’ may also be non-inclusive and ‘culturally loaded’, containing implicit messages for what a ‘winner’ would be like.

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### **4. Increasing and appreciating diversity and inclusion within WorldSkills UK, the Skills Competitions, and its partners**

The importance of role models and the impact of seeing oneself represented came out strongly in the research as a significant influence on competitors’ interest, confidence and participation. In particular, those who had exposure to role models found it a powerful motivator; those who did not have this exposure, however, felt negatively impacted by the lack of relatable role models.

Tutors, trainers, and Judges all play an important part in modelling success. This is compounded by the fact that competitors lack diverse role models in the experts they see in the technical skills sector – especially in an environment where 92% of WorldSkills UK Judges and 93% of Training Managers are White British (based on 2018 Skills Competitions data).

In addition, many who were surveyed in the research said that more could be done to get WorldSkills UK’s positive and diverse branding out to more people. This includes ensuring that marketing and communications materials are accessible to potential competitors. This is also about ensuring inclusivity within the competition journey: from appreciating the need for gender neutral rooms (for those who travel and stay overnight at competitions) and bathrooms to diversifying the offering around particular competitions (e.g. both European and Afro-Caribbean hairdressing).



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## 5. Forming a clear vision and narrative around diversity and inclusion across WorldSkills UK and its partners

**WorldSkills UK exists because of its strong partnerships and collaboration.**

WorldSkills UK exists because of its strong partnerships and collaboration. The sheer volume of current partners and individuals involved in WorldSkills UK gives credence to its convening power and its potential to influence more partners and individuals to transform diversity and inclusion. WorldSkills UK LIVE, with the National Skills Competitions, brings together 70,000 visitors, including competitors, schools, employers, colleges and other stakeholders.

Within this network WorldSkills UK has the influence and convening power to shape what diversity and inclusion means across its partnerships. From a focus on learning (e.g. understanding that different structures require different changes and appreciating the journey equally to the end goal), to promoting and rewarding positive action, all the while effecting change internally and sharing it – positive shifts in diversity and inclusion are possible.

Aiming to facilitate learning, showcase best practice, to link up activity, perceptions and narratives and to award positive action on diversity and inclusion is an important first step. The natural follow-on for this is how WorldSkills UK leads the way on a global stage through WorldSkills International.

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# Recommendations

Based on these data and insights WorldSkills UK could transform culture and practice at home, amongst its partners and society more broadly by implementing the following recommendations: (for the full list of recommended actions, see Appendix 3 of main report: Recommendations with supporting actions):

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## **Form new strategic partnerships with groups that can help achieve diversity and inclusion goals**

By developing partnerships with government, business, and others who can financially sustain or endow the Skills Competitions and its competitors, WorldSkills UK can both emphasise and disseminate the business case for diversity and inclusion in the Skills Competition, and increase awareness of the Skills Competitions amongst students, young people, and apprentices

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## **Launch a shared Commission for Diversity and Inclusion in the sector**

WorldSkills UK has the opportunity to harness its partnerships to focus activity around diversity and inclusion in the technical skills sectors, including by involving young people in systems change across the FE sector.

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## **Create tools and guidelines showcasing what works to support partners to achieve diversity and inclusion goals**

In supporting its partners to deliver the Skills Competitions, WorldSkills UK can embed diversity and inclusion from the start, by providing platforms through which good practice can be showcased, encouraging colleges and employers to support peer mentoring, and increasing the breadth of research to improve this activity across the ecosystem.

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## **Develop a shared vision and set targets for what diversity and inclusion in the Skills Competitions ought to look like**

A common, shared vision for diversity and inclusion, alongside agreements with partners to set positive action and diversity targets can have widespread influence across the sector and the Skills Competitions.

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## **Involve competitors more actively across the WorldSkills UK ecosystem**

Competitors are the primary stakeholder of Skills Competition and could significantly influence inclusive processes through increased involvement: e.g. a diverse youth advisory board, or increased roles in the roadshows.

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## **Establish consistency across all partners through standardising Skills Competition processes**

Standardisation of certain processes can ensure both broad and specific commitment to inclusive ways of working, removing a risk of this inconsistency causing only increasing inclusion in certain partners, skills, or areas.



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### **Target diverse areas of the UK**

WorldSkills UK can improve its Skills Competitions by working with areas which are more diverse and can have more inclusive cultures, both to ensure that this influences the wider network and the competitor experience.

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### **Lead by example in driving diversity and inclusion internally and in the Skills Competitions**

The WorldSkills UK network and its Skills Competitions can only change with WorldSkills effecting that change internally, and sharing insight and learning from their experience. This has already started and can be continued and improved through integration of competitor feedback.

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### **Provide signposting to quality diversity and inclusion training and support**

Although WorldSkills UK does not have the financial capability to provide direct support, they are able to signpost their partners to quality training and induction, whilst increasing the support to their own staff (including Judges and Training Managers).

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### **Adapt the communications and marketing strategy**

A relatively quick win for WorldSkills UK centres around their marketing and comms strategy – including revisiting their brand as a Diversity and Inclusion Champion.

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## **Conclusion**

Sustaining progress around diversity and inclusion is difficult. It requires a level of long-term human and financial investment from existing and potential partners, especially to ‘win the war on talent’ and ensure persistent, systemic benefit. This report argues that this hard work is worthwhile – that commitment to inclusive practice provides invaluable benefits for people, for the sector and for the wider economy.

As a charity with a specific programmatic remit, WorldSkills UK’s funding is limited in terms of outreach, sponsorship and other activities it can currently achieve. This report is also a megaphone to partners and potential funders: we all know that change is vital and urgent, and it requires significant long-term investment. The call to action is necessary for all.

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