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The Royal Statistical Society calls for strengthening data skills apprenticeships as new survey reveals concerning gaps in statistical training across the UK public

The Royal Statistical Society (RSS) has found that nearly 60 per cent of the UK public has not completed any statistics or data analysis training, and it is calling for the Department for Education to strengthen its data skills apprenticeship offering.

In the nationally representative survey of over 2,000 respondents, the learned society found that only one in ten were aware of their options for learning data analysis and just over one in ten (13%) thought they had all the statistical skills they needed for their work.

Equally concerning is that only 15% of respondents anticipated their job being impacted in the next five to ten years by changes to the way we use data as a society, and three quarters (75%) of those did not feel equipped to adapt to these potential changes.

Previous research has found that constraints on access to statistics and data analysis skills are a significant concern for many employers, and that the lack of skills is dampening innovation and productivity. To ensure that the UK has the skills it needs, the RSS believes it is vital that our skills systems support the full pipeline of training, from early education through to professional development of existing employees.

Despite the clear need for lifting statistical literacy and data analysis skills at all levels, the RSS report found that many people found it difficult to identify what to learn and how to judge the quality of the learning options available. Up to four-fifths (79%) of those who felt they lacked statistical analysis skills required for their work were not aware of their options for further training.

The research included a series of questionnaires and interviews with data analysts and employers. It found that participants were generally positive about their apprenticeship experience including the applicability of the skills they were learning and the knowledge of their tutors. However, participants also pointed to general disorganisation and difficulties with access to information and communication from their providers. Course information often was not timely, lacked detail, was inaccurate, or unhelpful. Many participants also found it difficult to identify which providers delivered a high-quality service prior to enrolling.

To address these issues, the RSS is calling on the Department for Education to review its current online rating system for providers, to improve the accuracy and depth of information available on provider quality. It is also calling for the department to work with training providers to improve the information available on course content, including the specific skills, software platforms and techniques that will be taught.

Dr Sarah Cumbers, chief executive of the Royal Statistical Society, commenting on the research, said: “Advances in how we use data are not just changing careers but transforming whole industries. It is therefore crucial that we have an education system that can deliver for both those starting their career and the existing workforce.

“Uptake of statistical training needs to improve if we are to meet employers’ demands for data skills, and prevent people being left behind. The best way to do this is to improve access to information provider quality, and give people much needed support on how to navigate the statistics and data analysis training available to them.”

Notes to editors:

- The report *‘Fit for Purpose? An Exploration of Non-Degree Pathways into Data Analysis Careers’* can be read in full here: <https://rss.org.uk/RSS/media/File-library/Policy/Higher%20education%20policy/2023/Final-Report-v-2023-10-19.pdf?ext=.pdf>
- The RSS is grateful to the Gatsby Foundation for generously funding this research.
- The RSS would like to express its gratitude to the project steering group consisting of Eugenie Hunsicker, Ernest Edifor, Victoria Brunsdon, Sayma Chowdhury, Mike Deevy, Ben Jordan, Alison Adams, and Daniel Sandford-Smith for volunteering their time and insights.
- The RSS commissioned in June 2023, a nationally representative UK wide survey of those aged 16 and over, which yielded 2,155 responses across a range of demographics.
- The Royal Statistical Society (RSS), founded in 1834, is one of the world’s most distinguished and renowned statistical societies. It is a learned society for statistics, a professional body for statisticians and data scientists and a charity which promotes statistics, data and evidence for the public good. Today the RSS has over 11,000 members around the world. [@RoyalStatSoc](https://rss.org.uk)