ENGLISH ASTIR

STEPPINGSTONE TO 7.0

Reading - Global issues and opportunities Questions 1-14

With your teacher. Do you think skills are more important than knowledge in the modern world? What do you think are the three most important skills that young people need to have a job? Give reasons and examples.

READING PASSAGE

You should spend about 20 minutes on ***Questions 1–14****, which are based on the Reading Passage below.*

Is there REALLY a skills shortage in the engineering industry, or are employers just not paying up?

It is common knowledge in the engineering industry that there's a skills shortage. Apparently, 50% of the entire workforce is due to retire within the next five years. How are we going to fill the positions if nobody has the skills? So more needs to be done to encourage young people to take up engineering and technology jobs if the sector is going to be able to fulfil its need. But actually, is there more to it than meets the eye?

Marcus Body, a consultant in the Brand and Insight team at employer marketing company ThirtyThree (and engineering graduate), believes that employers need to stop shifting the blame onto jobseekers' skills, or apparent lack of. Let's start with degrees. Does a degree have any value anymore? Marcus says: "There's an enormous elephant in the room in graduate recruitment, which is that some universities are better than others."

This implies that you could be studying engineering right now at university and already be at a disadvantage if your institution isn't prestigious enough. He goes on to say that: "The reality is that first stages of screening are done by people – either in-house or at third party suppliers – who know nothing about engineering, so they will use crazy criteria, from degree grade through to spelling." If this is the case, then it's no surprise when companies have problems with recruiting a new generation of engineers and technicians. Could it be that companies are simply being far too fussy with their criteria? They cannot expect a graduate to be able to replace someone who's about to retire – and has probably been in the job for over thirty years – like-for-like.

According to The Institute of Engineering and Technology (IET) Annual Skills Survey for 2014, approximately 40% of its

respondents indicated that they have trouble recruiting engineering graduates. When asked why they don't expect to be able to recruit suitable candidates over the next 4 to 5 years, over 70% of respondents said it was due to lack of suitably qualified candidates, and half of the respondents said shortages or difficulties with specific skills. The worrying term used here is the word 'specific'. How specific are companies willing to get with jobseekers' requirements?

On the other hand, apprenticeships seem to be increasingly popular among companies looking for fresh talent, which is reassuring. The IET's Annual Skills Survey says that over the next five years, over half answered that they believe they will employ more apprentices in technical roles than they have in the past. Marcus Body isn't surprised by this statistic. He says: "Apprenticeships are really taking off – loads of good ones in engineering, and employers are keen. The difficulty is in getting the infrastructure together to manage those apprentices – trainers, supervisors etc." Over a third of respondents in the 2014 Skills Survey said that they would focus more on apprentices and graduates when recruiting the people they need in the next four to five years – so the demand could be there very soon, which is good news for graduates.

Eventually, these things come down to money. Marcus Body reckons that if the UK industry offered a higher salary, there wouldn't be any shortages at all: "Sectors steal the best graduates with more money. Before we can declare a skills shortage, we should double the salary offered and see if they're still unfillable." However, companies are reluctant to use this as a tactic to lure in graduates. Less than 20% of the IET's survey respondents said they would create more attractive salaries when asked how they would recruit the people they need over the next 4 to 5 years.

There's also one more area where any shortages in the engineering industry can be rooted: education. There are plenty of news stories out there saying that schools need to work harder to attract students towards STEM subjects (science, technology, engineering and maths). However, does the 'STEM' discussion need to really come to an end? Marcus states that the whole discussion of 'STEM' as one thing entirely unhelpful. "There is no such thing as a 'STEM' employee. There are areas that are harder to recruit (like very specific disciplines of engineering), and areas where we have a surplus – e.g. the 20,000 per year psychology graduates we produce and don't have psychology jobs for."

It seems the consensus is quite uncertain. It can be debated that companies are using the skills shortage argument when in reality they should spend more time and effort recruiting or luring graduates with better salaries. Some companies are ahead of the game by offering more apprenticeships to get staff up to a suitable standard before the predicted retirement influx in the near future. There is no shortage of actual people. Applications to study engineering at UK universities having increased by seven per cent on the previous year. On the other hand if businesses want to replace staff due to retire; they're going to need to give a little slack on the application process.

How to go about it

For **Questions 1–9**:

- Look at the title and decide whether the summary relates to one part or the whole of the passage. A title can help you decide where to look in the passage.
- Skim the summary. Decide what type of word is needed for each space and think of your own word. The answers can be nouns, verbs, adjectives and adverbs.
- Skim the wordlist and predict the answer where you can, using your knowledge of grammar and collocation. Then skim the passage and check your predictions. Note, some answers in the summary can be in a different order from the passage.

For **Questions 10–14**:

- *Yes/No/Not Given* questions check the views or claims of the writer. Underline the words in the questions that will help you scan for the information in the passage.

Questions 1–9

Complete the summary using the list of words, A–O, below.

Reasons for a lack of engineers

It is well-known in the engineering industry that a 1 ..... exists. Moreover, as half of the workforce is expected to enter 2 ..... in the near future young people need to be 3 ..... to enter the engineering and technology 4 ..... . Marcus Body suggests that the 5 ..... is not to do with the skills of 6 ..... , but is connected with such people being at a 7 ..... because of the 8 ..... of their university training in engineering and the 9 ..... at the interview stage.

A disadvantage	**B** quality	**C** retirement
D encouraged	**E** adult skills	**F** employment
G excess	**H** skills shortage	**I** jobseekers
J educational experience	**K** time	**L** employers
M dilemma	**N** advantage	**O** screening process
P issue	**Q** profession	

Questions 10–14

Do the following statements agree with the claims of the writer in the Reading Passage?

Write:

YES *if the statement agrees with the claims of the writer*

NO *if the statement contradicts the claims of the writer*

NOT GIVEN *if it is impossible to say what the writer thinks about this*

10 The IET's annual survey was more extensive in 2014 than in previous years.

11 A small proportion of respondents said their graduate recruitment problem was to do with the suitability of candidates' qualifications.

12 It is possible employers will recruit more apprentices in the future.

13 A greater focus on higher salaries is essential for increasing the recruitment of engineers.

14 According to Marcus Body, thinking of all STEM subjects as one idea has a negative effect on shortages in the engineering industry.

2 Discuss with your teacher. Do you think anything can be done to deal with the situation of skill shortages in all areas? Give reasons and examples for your answer.