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INTRODUCTION

As BCS continues its well-received series of Digital Skills Network events across the UK, this report focuses on Reading, where the latest event is being hosted in June 2023. This tech labour market report, with additional skills commentary from BCS experts, focuses on the local IT skills market and also provides larger context on vocational skills and apprenticeships.

Reading is a good place for a career in IT professionals, with IT jobs representing 13% of the workforce in the area in 2021. That's 17,000 people in the Reading area who were working in IT businesses. And that 13% compares very healthily to the 6% and 4% for the South East and the UK respectively.

It's a particularly good place for programming and development positions, as the report estimates that around one in six IT specialists working in Reading were in programming/development positions. In line with that, programming jobs accounted for almost one in three IT vacancies advertised (28%) in the district during 2021.



Launched by BCS in May 2022, the Digital Skills Network aims to tackle some of the most pressing issues in the UK's IT skill shortage by provoking discussion and facilitating conversation and action between interested parties. This includes government departments, industry stakeholders, employers of all sizes and from all sectors, providers and educators, policymakers, local digital skills boards, charities and partner organisations.

As this work continues, look out for more intelligence on the subject from BCS. For example, earlier in 2023, the Digital Skills Network launched its first Scotland Labour Market report, and that will be published soon by BCS, alongside a report looking at the whole UK labour market.

Brian Runciman Head of content and insight, BCS, the Chartered Institute for IT

DIGITAL APPRENTICESHIPS 2023

BCS' TONY PITCHFORD LOOKS AT THE CURRENT STATE OF APPRENTICESHIPS.

FUELLING THE ECONOMY THROUGH DIGITAL APPRENTICESHIPS

As we adapt to a post-Brexit economy, skilled workers are in demand across all sectors. The UK government has made apprenticeships a key policy since April 2017, and they're increasingly offered up as the solution to employers' recruitment and retention challenges. But can they live up to the hype?

The short answer is yes! Apprenticeships are an effective way for employers to acquire and develop talent. The longer answer is that they only work when the right financial, practical, and social support is in place. In this article, we delve into the recent developments impacting skills programmes in England, and explore what more is needed to unlock the full potential of digital apprenticeships.

ADDRESSING ENGLAND'S SKILLS SHORTAGE

The good news is that apprenticeships are growing steadily, and the first six months of the 22/23 academic year saw 22% more apprentices complete programmes than in the same period last year. No longer the preserve of school leavers, apprenticeships are now upskilling the existing workforce and retraining staff as businesses adapt to new technology.

But there is still a way to go in the quest to bridge the skills gap, and the government has launched a range of recent initiatives to accelerate this growth. There is a payment of up to £1,000 for hiring an apprentice aged 16-18, from the 1st August some apprentices will be eligible for a £3,000 care leaver's bursary, and Local Enterprise Partnerships, and Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs) are encouraging uptake through levy-sharing schemes. On top of this, small to medium businesses can now take on more than ten apprentices per year after the long-standing cap was removed.

'Returnerships' were launched in the budget statement of spring 2023, combining apprenticeships with sector-based work academy programmes and Skills Bootcamps to offer over 50s faster, more flexible training that builds on their previous experience.

Skills Bootcamps are growing rapidly, and the Department for Education has committed £63 million to the programmes for 2024. Bootcamps help those over 19 retrain for new roles, giving employers access to diverse pools of professionals who are often apprenticeshipready. Alternatively, sector-based work academy Programmes offer short work experience placements and pre-employment training to prepare learners for the world of work.

The government is also investing in T Level technical qualifications, launched in 2020 and equivalent to three A levels. These provide a stepping stone to apprenticeships through 80% learning in the classroom and 20% in a work placement (the reverse structure of an apprenticeship). While there has been a mixed reaction, many employers, including Lloyds Banking Group and BCS, are recognising T Levels as an opportunity to nurture fresh talent in the workplace.

A major challenge of building a digital skills pipeline is convincing young people of the many exciting career paths open to them in IT. Thankfully, the government's Skills and Post-16 Education Act passed in 2022, is set to help address this lack of awareness. Building on the infamous 'Baker Clause', the act ensures all secondary school pupils are exposed to technical education providers so that they can learn about the wide range of career and training options available outside of the traditional academic routes.

SUPPORTING APPRENTICES THROUGH EPA

Apprenticeships are a partnership, and they can only succeed when providers, employers, and assessment organisations work together.

Around 80% of an apprentice's time is spent at work, giving them continual opportunities to apply and develop their skills. But good quality training from a university, college, or training provider is just as crucial, and is often a deciding factor in whether an apprentice achieves occupational competence.

We know from research that achievement rates are important for apprentices' long-term prospects. In fact, apprentices who complete their programmes earn more compared with those who do not, and a report by the St Martin's Group revealed that 83% of completers have a positive outcome such as a pay rise, promotion, or permanent job with the same employer, compared with just half of those who withdraw from their apprenticeship.

While digital apprentices are more likely to complete their programmes than those in other sectors, more can be done to support learners towards completion. According to research by the Education and Skills Funding Agency, common reasons for apprentices withdrawing include not having enough time for learning or training, and poor relationships with employers.

BCS recently launched the Line Manager Toolkit to help employers support their apprentices in the workplace and through end-point assessment (EPA). The toolkit covers key apprenticeship concepts, establishes roles and responsibilities, and offers practical guidance on things like assessment and continuous professional development. Employers in the tech sector can use these resources alongside advice from providers and the government to boost their own and their apprentices' confidence. Line Manager Toolkit webinars will be listed on the BCS events calendar.

CHANGING PERCEPTIONS OF APPRENTICESHIPS

Apprenticeships are already vital in many industries, and they're becoming a more common route into roles traditionally dominated by university graduates. But negative perceptions of apprenticeships persist, meaning young people still face barriers to accessing opportunities. The recent launch of a Medical Doctor Apprenticeship was met with scepticism from parts of the UK media, with concerns ranging from apprentices' age and lack of university education, to whether there will be enough resources to train them.

These concerns ignore the fact that those beginning apprenticeships and degrees are often the same age, that the apprenticeship includes an integrated degree, and that it requires a portion of off-the-job training delivered by a university medical school or specialist training provider. Clearly, more needs to be done to overcome the idea that apprenticeships are inferior to degrees, and to promote the benefits they bring to employers, employees, and the UK economy.

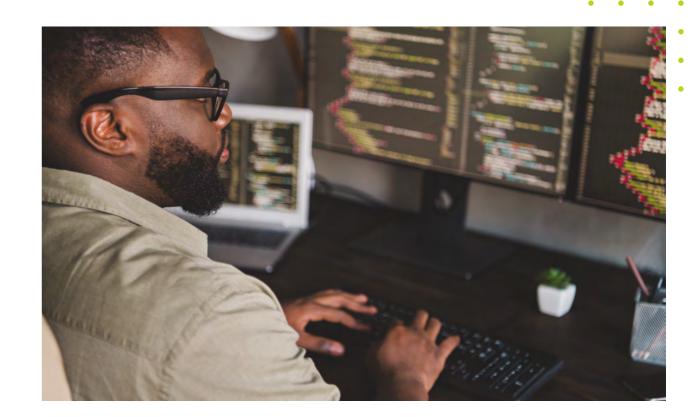
THE ROLE OF DIGITAL APPRENTICESHIPS

In March, the government launched its artificial intelligence (AI) regulation white paper, calling for a balance between regulation and innovation while setting out five principles – safety, transparency, fairness, accountability, and contestability – that should shape the use of AI. This is the latest paper to highlight the need for competent, ethical and inclusive professionals in the tech sector, and apprenticeships can play a leading role in achieving this.

There are currently digital apprenticeship standards covering roles such as AI data specialist, DevOps engineer, data analyst, cyber security technician, and digital marketer. Standards are being added all the time, with new apprenticeships for digital product managers, machine learning engineers, and digital learning designers expected in the coming year.

At BCS, we're proud to help learners and employers benefit from successful apprenticeships. We've assessed around 75% of all digital apprenticeships, and recently celebrated our 20,000th end-point assessment. We also love recognising apprentices' talent and dedication. Now in its second year, the BCS IT & Digital Apprenticeship Awards received more than 215 entries and over 100 nominations were reviewed for shortlisting across a range of categories, with each of our finalists demonstrating a positive impact on their organisation, sector and society.

It's clear that apprenticeships are better equipped than ever to meet the needs of both employers and professionals. With the right investment and support, digital apprenticeships can satisfy the fast-changing demands of the tech industry and benefit society as a whole.





VOCATIONAL QUALIFICATIONS AND SKILLS

ZOE SPILBERG ANALYSES THE RECENT EXTENSIVE REFORMS OF THE VOCATIONAL QUALIFICATIONS LANDSCAPE IN ENGLAND.

Vocational reform has crossed key milestones in recent months and since the Skills and Post-16 Education Act was passed in April 2022, we've seen significant change to the skills training system in England – presenting both opportunities and challenges for the

From 2025, young people will have the option to choose either an 'academic' pathway or a 'technical' pathway, with T Levels being positioned as the central component of the technical offer at level 3. To clarify the distinction between these two pathways, technical qualifications are primarily designed to support progression to skilled employment or further technical training and academic qualifications are principally designed to support progression to higher education. The government's objective is to create a progressive, high quality and robust technical education system, built on occupational standards developed by employers - but there is still some ground to cover to full embed this system.

PHASED REFORM

The implementation of the widereaching reforms has been broken down into three phases. In Phase 1, we saw the removal of funding from around 5,500 qualifications to start to streamline the offer at Level 3 and below. This served to reduce the number of low-value courses and duplication in the qualification landscape, but also wiped out the popular, and highly effective, ICT for Users range of qualifications at level 2. Colleges and training providers are still struggling to fill this gap and to offer quality, comprehensive digital skills training at a deeper level than that possible through the Level 1 Essential Digital Skills Qualifications.

Phase 2 is the process of removing 16-19 funding from qualifications which overlap with T Levels, which were launched in 2020. There is a need for clarification on what constitutes overlap, beyond the qualifications having some similar outcomes to those in a T Level standard and that offer routes into employment in the same occupational areas. Qualifications in the digital sector will be among those to lose

funding under this criterion from 1st August 2024.

Finally, Phase 3 has just recently got underway with the introduction of a triple-regulatory approach for all academic and technical qualifications. As part of this, the Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education (IfATE) now has responsibility for approving all new technical qualifications at Level 3, driving forward with the requirement for assessments to be more directly aligned to employers' needs than we've seen before.

All approved qualifications will need to demonstrate their occupational relevance and how they meet employer demand in a set of criteria designed by IfATE.

Ofqual will still be regulating awarding bodies against the General Conditions of Recognition, and the DfE will prescribe the size of new qualifications and will also make the final decision on funding approval, hence the three-pronged approach to regulation now operating within the assessment sector.

The technical qualifications that are reviewed in this new-look process,

and will be made available to deliver alongside T Levels, will be split across three groups; technical occupational entry, technical additional specialist, and technical cross-cutting function. It is understood that the landscape for adults will be more extensive, particularly in the technical pathway. IfATE's guidance on adult design principles for technical qualifications states: 'In order to ensure accessibility for all adults, technical education qualifications intended for delivery to adult students should be designed to allow for modular delivery and the recognition of prior learning... these elements should help adults access opportunities to reskill or upskill, allowing them to fit study around existing responsibilities such as work or caring."

The decision about whether T Levels themselves will be made available to adults is still yet to be made and will be decided upon following the two-year pilot that started last September.

The good news for training providers is that, when allocated, funding will be in place for longer and will be granted in blocks of three years, and the qualifications will also be eligible for 16-18 performance measures.

It's worth clarifying here that apprenticeships and traineeships are out of scope for this review. This is because they are funded based on a programme basis, and any qualifications that are included in those programmes do not require a separate approval process.

In support of the Lifetime Skills Guarantee announced in 2020, we've seen the creation of Local Skills Improvement Plans (LSIPs), developed by employer representative bodies, alongside local authorities and educators, to ensure employers have a direct and significant say in skills development. A Lifelong Loan Entitlement (equal to four years of funding for post-18 education) has also been established since the bill was passed, and that will go live in 2025.

LEVEL 2 AND BELOW

As well as the restructuring of the level 3 landscape we have since had the government response to the Level 2 and below consultation. To be approved for funding, all qualifications at this level will also need to align to employer-led standards and further guidance on this detailing the extensive approval process was published at the end of April 2023. Disappointingly, digital qualifications have not been included in the scope for the first round of approval for 2025 delivery. The rationale for this is that all new qualifications must 'match up to employer-defined occupational standards' - but the difficulty here is that at present there are no Level 2 occupational standards for digital and no consensus as yet as to whether there should be. The lack of level 2 could be a critical gap in provision and calls for careful analysis of occupational skill requirements at this

Within the academic qualification space, A Levels will continue to be at the core of 16-19 academic study programmes, but the provision will be augmented by a new group known as Alternative Academic Qualifications. Some of the qualifications approved in this range will be categorised as 'small' (up to the size of an A level) and can be taken alongside A levels, while others will be 'large' (the size of 2 or 3 A levels) and can serve as alternatives to A levels. We are aware that small

computing and IT qualifications are also being considered for approval. However, there's no provision for additional large qualifications, as it's believed that the existing options of A Levels and T Levels adequately meet the requirements for young people to successfully enter the job market.'

The context of this reform is that the adult education market is facing ongoing and significant challenges regarding funding - according to the Institute for Fiscal Studies, total spending on adult education and apprenticeships will be 25 per cent lower in 2025 compared with 2011 and - if we consider classroom-based learning on its own - spending has plummeted by 50% over ten years. Naturally, this backdrop will make it even harder to achieve the DfE's ambitions to create world-class technical education and to develop the specialised skills needed by the workforce of the future. Employers in the UK invest just half the EU average per employee on training, so there's a lot of pressure on the FE and adult education sector to meet the future need, but while working with an ongoing real-terms financial deficit.

There's a lot of change in the education space and a massive need to ensure provision and funding will meet market demand for skills. BCS continues to work closely with employers, educators, policy makers and regional digital boards to find effective solutions, diven by the need to ensure a diverse pipeline of talent into the IT profession.



Accredit Your Programmes with BCS

BCS Accreditation is the benchmark for quality in the technology industry.

When you work with us, you join the quest to raise education standards and prepare professionals to tackle the biggest challenges in tech.

What is BCS Accreditation?

Whether you deliver courses externally or for your own employees, accreditation is the best way to prove they meet rigorous standards. It ensures your teaching, content, and outcomes support the current and future priorities of the technology industry.

The BCS Tech10 and Dev10 accreditation programmes provide independent verification that your digital courses meet existing standards.



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- Prepare learners to excel in the workplace.
- Prove to employers that your programmes produce a steady stream of outstanding talent.
- Ensure your courses are relevant, engaging, and outstrip the competition.

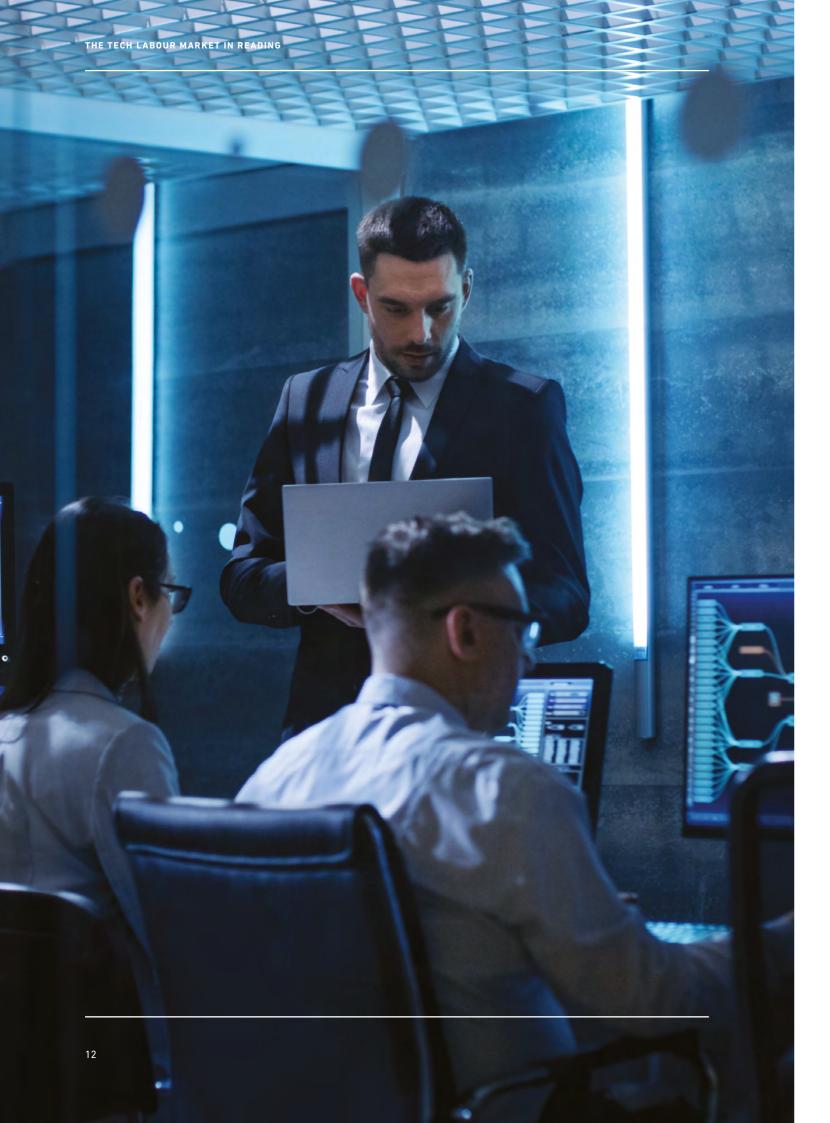


Dev10 for employers

Empower your tech teams to reach their full potential with externally validated courses.

- Give your people the technical skills to grow your organisation.
- Get support to ensure your programmes meet the highest industry standards.
- Engage employees and increase uptake with a recognisable offering.
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- Boost your organisation's profile by association with a prestigious professional body.

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1. IT SPECIALISTS

1.1 READING HAS A NOTABLY HIGHER CONCENTRATION OF IT SPECIALISTS THAN THE UK OR THE SOUTH EAST OF ENGLAND

In 2021 there were approximately 16,000 IT specialists working in Reading, equating to 13% of the workforce in Reading. By comparison, IT specialists made up only 6% of UK workers as a whole and 7% of those in the South East.

Compared with other districts, Reading has the eighth highest concentration of IT specialists – in a year when there were approximately 35 districts with an IT concentration of 10% or more (i.e. 10% of those working in the district were working in IT positions).

Looking longer term, Reading's IT strength is even more pronounced, and when considering the period 2012-2021 in its entirety (as the survey base is quite low for individual years), only Hart (Hampshire) was associated with a higher concentration of IT specialists (13% versus 12% on average for the period for the two regions). When considering the 2012-21 period in total it should also be noted that there were just 10 local authority districts with an IT workforce concentration of 10% or more (where data is available) – most in the South East of England/ London.

Figure 1:

IT SPECIALIST CONCENTRATION BY DISTRICT – 2012-21 AVERAGE (WHERE 10% OR ABOVE)

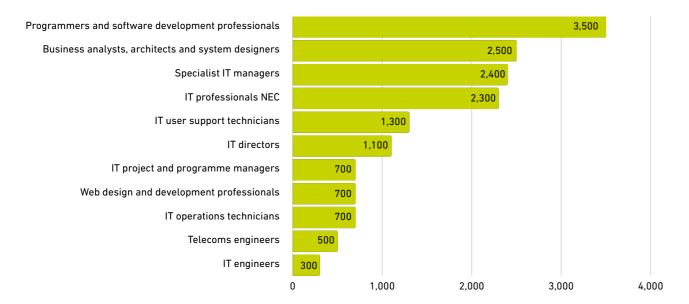
Hart	13%
Reading	12%
Bracknell Forest	12%
City of London	11%
Wokingham	11%
Spelthorne	11%
Tower Hamlets	11%
Cambridge	11%
West Berkshire	10%
Welwyn Hatfield	10%

Source: BCS analysis of data from the ONS Annual Population Survey (APS)

1.2 AROUND ONE IN SIX (15%) IT SPECIALISTS WORKING IN READING IN 2021 WERE PROGRAMMERS/DEVELOPERS

Assuming the occupational profile of IT specialists working in Reading is in line with that of the South East as a whole then there were approximately 3,500 programmers/software developers working in Reading in 2021 (22% of IT specialists in Reading) along with 2,500 business analysts (15%), 2,400 IT managers (15%) and 2,300 'other' or unclassified IT specialists (14%).

Figure 2: IT SPECIALISTS WORKING IN READING BY OCCUPATIONAL GROUP (2021 ESTIMATE)

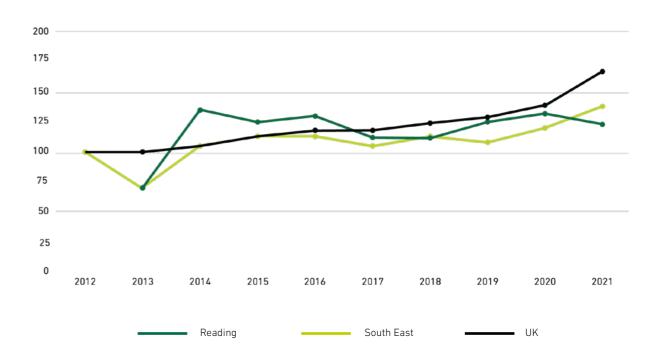


Source: BCS analysis of data from the ONS Annual Population Survey (APS)

1.3 THOUGH THERE HAS BEEN AN UPWARD TREND IN THE NUMBER OF IT SPECIALISTS IN RECENT YEARS, THE GROWTH RATE FOR READING IS WELL BELOW THAT OF THE SOUTH EAST AND THE UK

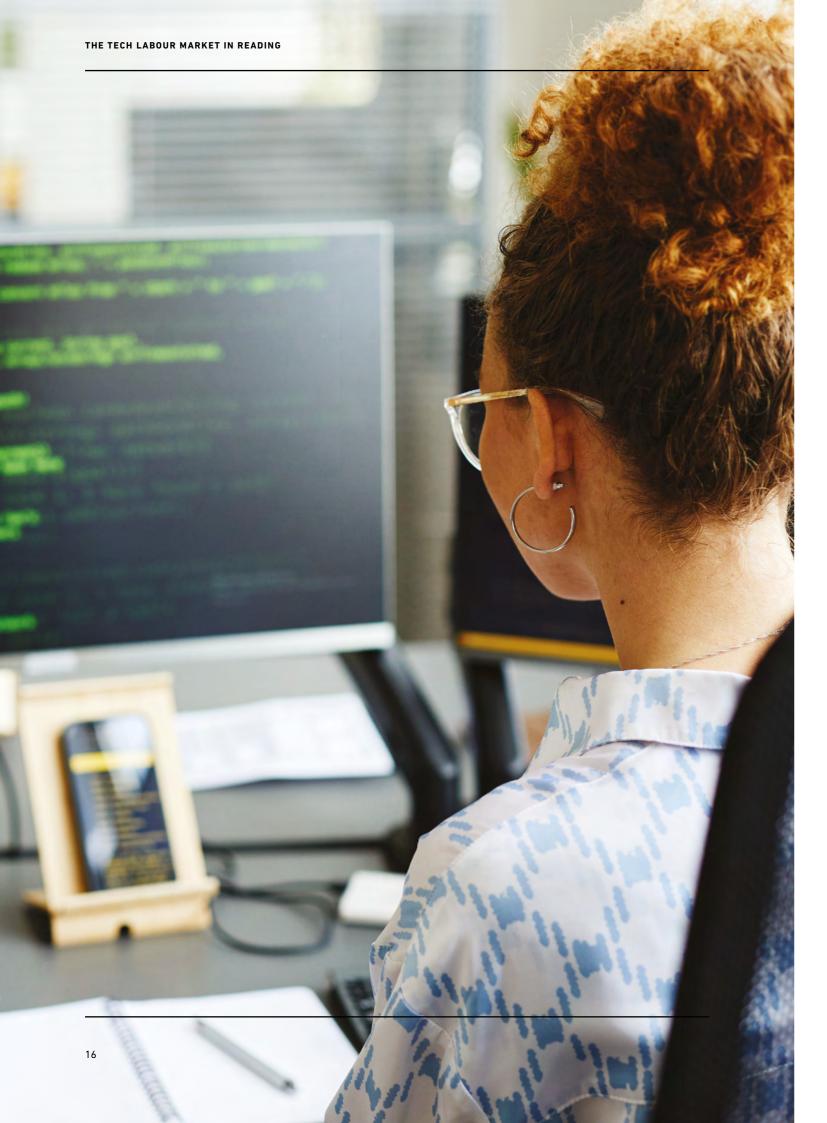
The number of IT specialists working in Reading grew by 23% between 2012 and 2021 – a rate little over half of that observed for the South East of England (38%) and less than third the rate recorded for the UK (67%). Growth was however, well in excess of that recorded in the workforce as a whole (IT specialists + other workers) which stood at 9% for Reading, the South East and the UK over the 2012-21 period.

Figure 3:
CHANGE IN IT SPECIALIST NUMBERS BY AREA (INDEXED)



Source: BCS analysis of data from the ONS Annual Population Survey (APS)





2. IT INDUSTRY WORKERS

2.1 READING HAS A NOTABLY HIGHER CONCENTRATION OF IT INDUSTRY WORKERS THAN THE UK OR THE SOUTH EAST OF ENGLAND

As with IT specialists, the concentration of people working in IT businesses is much higher in Reading than either the South East of England or the UK as a whole, and in 2021, 17,000 people or 13% of all those working in the Reading area were working in IT businesses (versus 6% and 4% for the South East and the UK respectively). This would perhaps be expected given that typically, almost half of IT specialists in the UK are employed within the IT industries (IT businesses).

Compared with other LADs, Reading had the seventh highest concentration of workers in the IT industries in 2021, and when considering the period 20120-21 it was third behind Hart and Bracknell Forest.

Figure 4:

IT INDUSTRY CONCENTRATION BY DISTRICT – 2012-21 AVERAGE WHERE 10% OR ABOVE

Hart	17%
Bracknell Forest	14%
Reading	13%
West Berkshire	13%
Slough	12%
Wokingham	12%
Windsor and Maidenhead	11%
Basingstoke and Deane	10%

Source: BCS analysis of data from the ONS Annual Population Survey (APS)

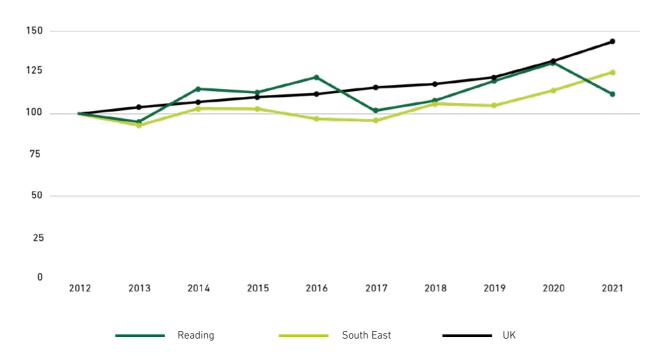
2.2 IN 2021 AROUND EIGHT IN TEN IT INDUSTRY WORKERS IN READING WERE WORKING IN IT SERVICES

Again using the South East as a proxy, there were around 14,000 people working in IT services businesses in Reading in 2021 – 83% of all IT industry workers in Reading at that time. In addition there were around 2,000 working in IT sales/distribution (12%) and just 1,000 working in IT manufacturing.

2.3 GROWTH IN IT INDUSTRY EMPLOYMENT HAS BEEN LOWER IN READING THAN THE SOUTH EAST IN GENERAL OR THE UK AS A WHOLE

The number of people working in the IT industry in Reading grew by 12% between 2012 and 2021 – a rate less than half that for the South East of England (25%) and around one quarter of the increase recorded for the UK as a whole (43%).

Figure 5:
CHANGE IN IT INDUSTRY WORKERS BY AREA (INDEXED)



Source: BCS analysis of data from the ONS Annual Population Survey (APS)



DO YOU HAVE DIGITAL EXPERTISE?



LOOKING FOR A FLEXIBLE, FREELANCE OPPORTUNITY TO USE THOSE SKILLS?

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WORK REMOTELY WITH HOURS TO SUIT AND MARKET LEADING RATES OF PAY.

As the UK's leading digital apprenticeship end-point assessment organisation, BCS has a network of experienced digital professionals who are passionate about helping apprentices achieve the best possible result during their assessment.

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No previous assessor experience is needed – we provide comprehensive training and all the support you need to assess confidently and independently. What you will need is a minimum of 5 years' experience in your area of digital expertise and a strong desire to support the new apprentices starting out in their IT careers.

"Working with and supporting apprentices was something I was very interested in. I felt it would be meaningful work. The fact that I was able to do it using skills I've developed over my years of working was a bonus. The job itself is also fantastic in terms of work/life balance"

Katy, Associate Assessor March 2023

To find out more

campaign.bcs.org/associateassessors



3. DEMAND FOR IT SPECIALISTS

3.1 ADVERTISED POSITIONS FOR IT SPECIALISTS MORE COMMON FOR THE READING AREA THAN THE SOUTH EAST OR THE UK AS A WHOLE

There were (on average) approximately 1,800 vacancies for IT specialists (ICT staff) advertised for the Reading area during the months of 2021 – equivalent to 14% of all advertised positions in the area. This was well above the proportion recorded for the South East (9%) and the UK as a whole (10%) at that time.

Compared with other LADs, Reading had the tenth highest concentration of IT vacancies advertised (as a percentage of all adverts) during 2021.

Figure 6:

VACANCIES FOR IT SPECIALISTS AS PERCENTAGE OF ALL VACANCIES, 2021

Isles of Scilly	18%
Cambridge	17%
Midlothian	17%
City of Edinburgh	17%
Belfast	16%
Rushmoor	16%
Tewkesbury	15%
Dacorum	15%
Manchester	15%
Reading	14%

Source: BCS analysis of data from the ONS/Textkernel

3.2 IN 2021 JUST UNDER ONE IN THREE VACANCIES FOR IT SPECIALISTS IN READING WERE FOR PROGRAMMERS

While it's estimated that around one in six IT specialists working in Reading were in programming/development positions, programming jobs accounted for almost one in three IT vacancies advertised (28%) within the district during 2021.

3.3 AWS, AZURE AND PYTHON ARE THE TECHNICAL SKILLS MOST OFTEN CITED IN ADVERTS FOR IT SPECIALISTS IN READING

The technical skills most often cited in adverts for IT specialists in Reading over the past six months according to ITJobswatch were (in order): Azure, AWS, Python, SQL, JavaScript, CI/CD, Windows, C#, .NET and Roadmaps.

3.4 SOCIAL SKILLS, PROBLEM-SOLVING AND MENTORING ARE THE SOFT SKILLS MOST OFTEN CITED IN ADVERTS FOR IT SPECIALISTS IN READING

The soft skills most often cited in adverts for IT specialists in Reading over the past six months were (in order): social skills, problem-solving, mentoring, self-motivation, customer service, analytical skills and stakeholder management.

3.5 IN RECENT YEARS, DEMAND FOR IT SPECIALISTS IN READING HAS GROWN AT A FASTER RATE THAN IN THE SOUTH EAST MORE GENERALLY OR THE UK AS A WHOLE

Over the 2017-2021 period, the number of advertised vacancies (demand) for IT specialists in Reading was seen to grow by 35% compared with 31% across the South East and 29% for the UK. Demand growth for IT staff in Reading also outstripped that for workers as a whole (25%) during this period.

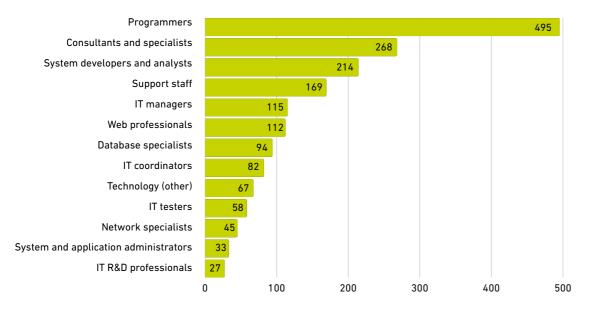
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Figure 7: VACANCIES FOR IT SPECIALISTS IN READING BY OCCUPATIONAL GROUP, 2021



Source: BCS analysis of data from the ONS/Textkernel

Figure 8: CHANGE IN DEMAND FOR IT SPECIALISTS, 2017-21



Source: BCS analysis of data from the ONS/Textkernel

Notes:

Workforce data sourced from ONS Annual Population Survey (APS) and relates to individuals aged 16–64 in employment within the stated area. IT specialists are defined by a range of Standard Occupational Classification (SOC2010) codes and for 2021 have been derived from the newer SOC2020 classification system – details available on request. IT industry data has been sourced from the same data set and in this case is defined by a range of Standard Industrial Classification (SIC2007) codes – details available on request.

Demand data (volumes) sourced from ONS/Textkernel – in this case IT specialists have been deemed to equate to the broad classification group 'Information and Communications Technology'.

Demand data (skills) sourced from ITJobswatch.

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