

System-level impact by WorldSkills

Summary report



Foreword

At WorldSkills, we believe that skills are the building blocks of human development. They support fairer societies, underpin secure economies, and lead to more prosperous nations. Now, with this report, we are able to show with more certainty how engagement with WorldSkills transforms systems.

Drawing on the experiences of WorldSkills Costa Rica, WorldSkills Japan, and WorldSkills UK, the WorldSkills Global Research Council and Oxford University have been able to understand how our Members turn Competition experience into lasting impact. What they have found is that change does not happen by accident.

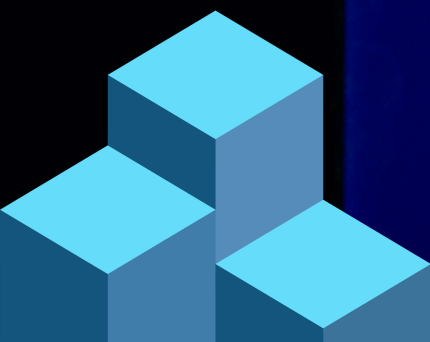
These Members have shared how they have shifted policies and mindsets through deliberate engagement with stakeholders across their national TVET systems, building on the insights, standards and frameworks they get from WorldSkills Competitions.

This research could not be timelier. As we finalize Vision 2035, we are committing to put rigorous impact measurement at the heart of our work. That means continuing to support the work of the WorldSkills Global Research Council as they partner with leading research institutions to prove our value at a national, regional, and international level.

Critically, we must then translate their evidence into insights that our Members can act on. Which is why this report is so important, as it helps us build a skills movement that is both credible and measurable.

I want to thank Dr Yushan Xie and Professor James Robson at Oxford University, the WorldSkills Global Research Council, and the three WorldSkills Members who gave their time and insight so generously. Together, you have created a clearer picture for our Members about the impact that is possible, and offered the guidance they need to transform their own systems.

David Hoey
CEO of WorldSkills International



1. Overview

At WorldSkills Conference 2024 in Lyon, Members and Global Partners heard how WorldSkills has the potential to become a catalyst for system-level impact¹. By that, we mean change that reaches beyond the competition floor into the wider skills system.

The WorldSkills Global Research Council has identified that this impact can happen at three levels, as shown in Figure 1.1 and outlined below:

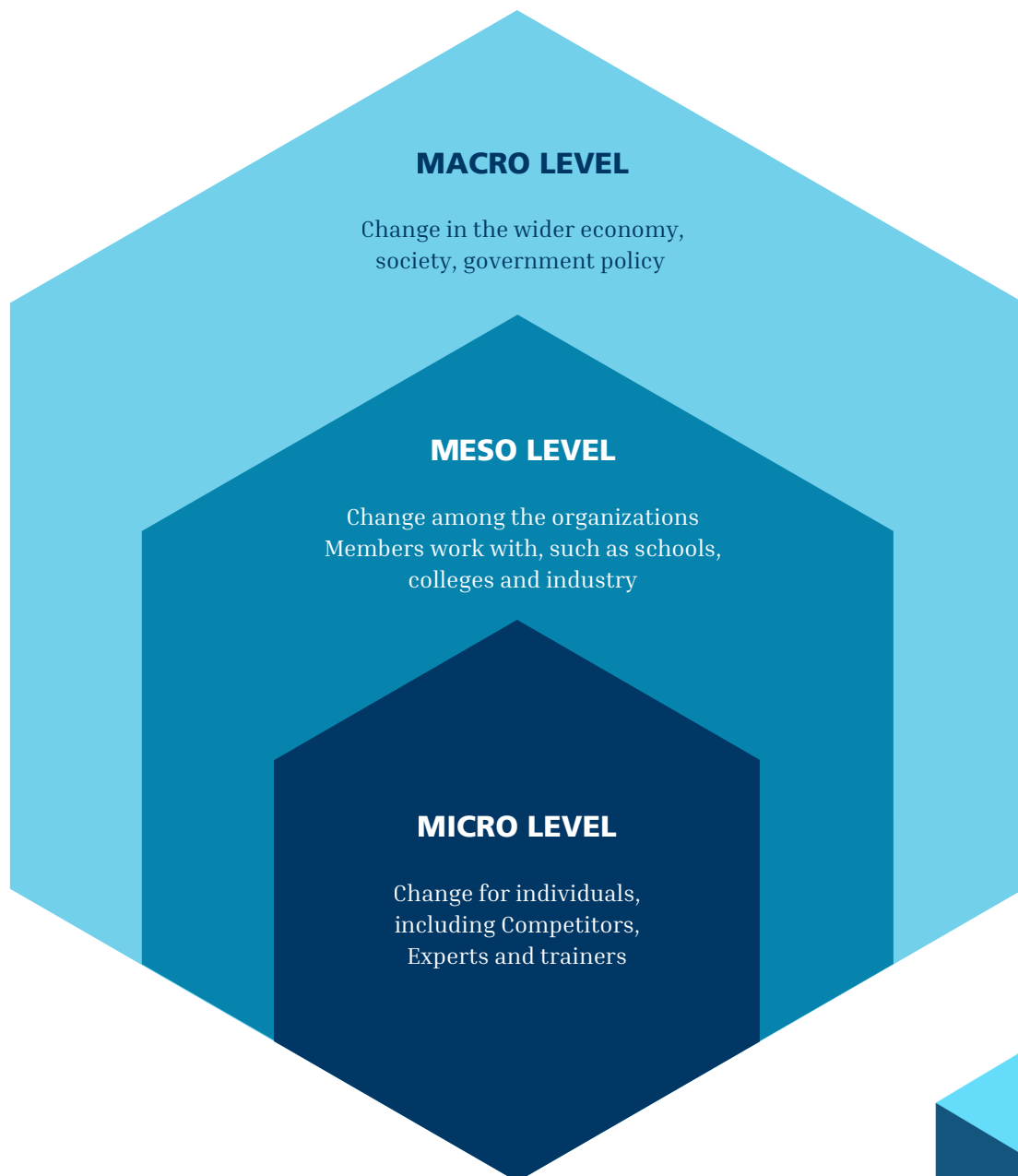


Figure 1.1: WorldSkills impact at the macro, meso, and micro levels
(Xie and Robson, 2024)

This research has gone on to examine this further using the experiences of three WorldSkills Members: WorldSkills Costa Rica, WorldSkills Japan and WorldSkills UK. By speaking to them, we have identified common dimensions that help Members turn engagement with WorldSkills into lasting, system-level impact.

The seven common dimensions are:

1. The strategic value of engagement with WorldSkills and skills competitions
2. Placing Competitors, Experts, trainers and teachers at the centre of impact
3. Standards as a core tool for impact
4. System dynamics and organizational positioning
5. Stakeholder engagement and alignment across the system
6. The role of success stories and impact research in gaining stakeholder buy-in
7. The role of leadership at different levels of the system

It is worth noting that the WorldSkills Global Research Council is not sharing these common dimensions as a fixed formula, but more as patterns drawn from three Member case studies. Our intention is that other Members can now learn from these patterns and apply those approaches that feel most relevant to their national context and TVET systems.

The research will also help shape WorldSkills Vision 2035 and become a future toolkit for Members to understand, build on, and share their own impact stories.

When embarking on this research, the WorldSkills Global Research Council designed it to surface early evidence of system-level impact, looking at where and how it happens. We set out to answer three things:

- How do Members connect into their national TVET policy system, such as funding, governance, and areas of work?
- How do the Members relate to training providers, employers and other stakeholders?
- What role do these Members play in creating impact, and how does WorldSkills contribute to that?

The three Members who took part were chosen to reflect differences in geography, economic context and national TVET policy. Each took part in an online survey and two rounds of 45–60 minute interviews. Although the sample is small, the depth of insight from these three countries offers useful learning for the wider WorldSkills membership.

The report now presents these findings as three standalone Member case studies. With each one, we summarize the Member's engagement and ongoing impact work, before sharing an analysis of their impact pathways or approaches. Where we can we bring these insights and advice to life through quotes from key representatives, alongside evidence from published literature, press releases and policy documents.

At the end of the report, we offer practical guidance for WorldSkills Members to apply to their own impact journey. It is worth remembering that there is no single route to impact. Every Member's approach will depend on its own position, role, capacity, resources, and the wider social, economic and political context it operates in. Nonetheless, the insights and common threads offer valuable learnings for anyone hoping to accelerate change. Significantly, they show how WorldSkills Competitions can facilitate these varied approaches and pathways and help Members achieve their goals and generate system-level impact within their country or region.



Pathways to impact

WORLDSKILLS ENGAGEMENT

- Competitions
- Cross-sectoral engagement and collaboration
- WorldSkills Occupational Standards (WSOS)
- International exchanges and collaborations
- Communities of knowledge, experiences, and practices

BROADER IMPACT

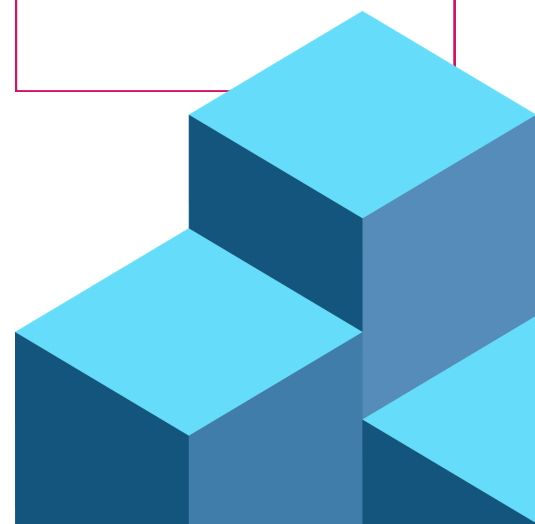
- More skilled individuals
- Higher quality of TVET training, curricula, and infrastructure
- Stronger cross-sectoral collaboration and partnerships
- Stronger leadership at different levels of the TVET structure and governance
- Better alignment between industry and education
- Improved perception of the attractiveness of TVET
- Better culture around skills across systems

APPROACHES

- WSOS as benchmark and reference for skills excellence
- Improve teaching, curriculum, assessment, and infrastructure
- Build capacity and skills of Experts, Competitors, trainers, and teachers
- Build stakeholder networks
- Create governance structures that facilitates collaboration
- Promote excellence and success
- Use evidence and success stories

IMPACT PATHWAYS

- Through individuals e.g. Experts, teachers, Competitors, parents
- Through organizations e.g. training providers, employers, social and industry partners, regulators
- Through TVET system e.g. teachers, standards, assessment, training, infrastructure, curriculum, qualifications, policies
- Through the broader systems e.g. relevant policy, cross-sectoral partnerships



2. WorldSkills Costa Rica

WorldSkills Costa Rica is represented by the Instituto Nacional de Aprendizaje (INA), the National Learning Institute. The INA is a national and autonomous body offering free skilled trades training to anyone over 15. As the country's largest public TVET institution, INA operates nine Regional Offices and 54 permanent Training Centres, ensuring equitable access nationwide. In 2024, it delivered more than 16,000 training and skills development services, generated over 204,000 enrolments, and served nearly 98,000 participants and around 3,500 enterprises.

Costa Rica became a full WorldSkills Member in 2015. In its first three years, INA explored how it could translate the learning and experience gained through WorldSkills into lasting, system-level improvements. To help, Costa Rica engaged actively in the WorldSkills ecosystem, taking part in committees, joining the Expert Faculty, applying for BeChangeMaker and the WorldSkills Champion Trust, and bidding to host the 2025 General Assembly, reinforcing its commitment to full membership and its benefits.

These efforts underscore Costa Rica's commitment to strengthening its role within WorldSkills and also aim to showcase, internally within the institution and nationally, the full potential and benefits of full membership. (INA)

This led INA to see WorldSkills as a strategic educational tool, not an isolated event. INA decided to take the six focus areas from WorldSkills Vision 2025 (Promoting Skills, Career Building, Skills Competitions, Education and Training, International Cooperation and Development, and Research)² and apply them as a foundation for national strategy, adapting them to local needs and priorities.

Given the pace of change required as an emerging country, INA prioritized curriculum development, teacher training, and student impact to raise national technical education standards.

This thinking evolved into the WorldSkills Costa Rica Model, a strategic framework integrating international benchmarking, quality assurance, teacher upskilling, student development, international cooperation, and institutional innovation into a continuous improvement cycle. The model also extended engagement beyond INA to bodies such as the Ministry of Public Education (MEP), SINAFOR (Sistema Nacional de Capacitación y Formación Profesional), SINEFOTEP (Sistema Nacional de Educación y Formación Técnica Profesional), and the National Qualification Framework.

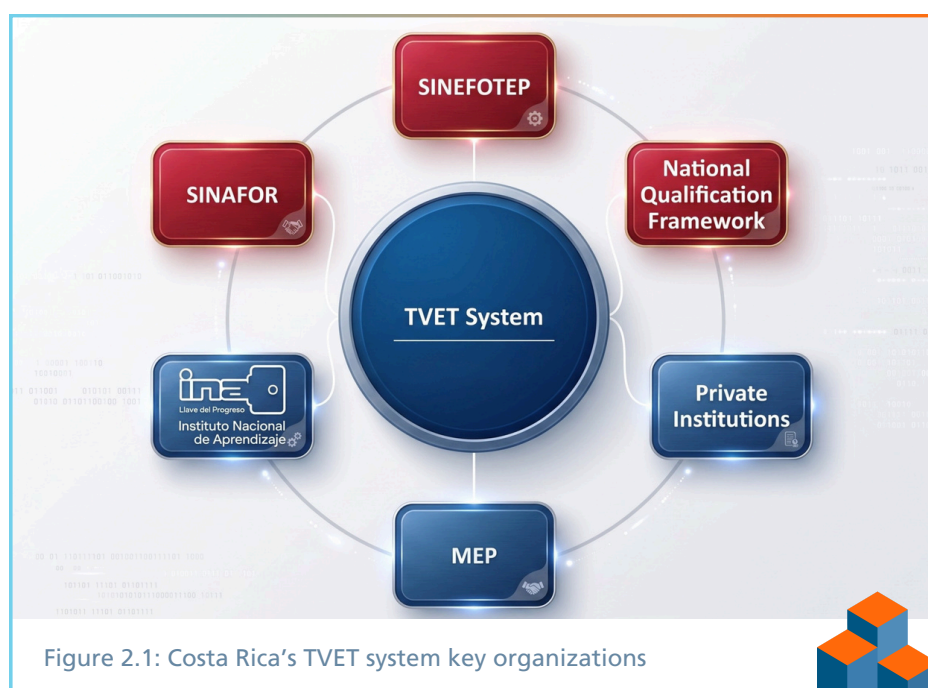


Figure 2.1: Costa Rica's TVET system key organizations



So how did Costa Rica shift from competing to transforming a system?

Five things stand out:

Firstly, INA took time to understand what WorldSkills is really for.

For INA, everything starts with seeing WorldSkills as a strategic framework, not just a competition. This wasn't an understanding INA arrived at immediately. It got there gradually, through trial and error and exchange with other Members:



You have to forget that the competition is an event. The competition is a movement, and it is a quality assurance tool. So you have to design the competition within your system in order to bring results."

WorldSkills Korea

This shift happened while WorldSkills Costa Rica faced real pressure at home, with critics questioning the cost of sending a small team abroad. That pressure became the turning point to move mindsets from "competition as an event" to "competition as a movement" and reframe WorldSkills as a mechanism for institutional learning and talent development. INA used its frameworks to identify gaps, mobilize teachers and experts, update curricula, strengthen quality assurance, promote international cooperation, and integrate global standards into regular institutional processes.

Secondly, INA reflected on its role within the broader system.

In Costa Rica, INA's broad national mandate and close working relationship with MEP, SINAFOR, SINEFOTEF and the National Qualification Framework give it a more strategic position within the TVET system to drive initiatives, developments and changes (see Figure 2.1).

At the same time, integrating learnings from WorldSkills into the national system requires a clear understanding of national needs and an ability to assess gaps. The WorldSkills Occupational Standards (WSOS), insights from the international competition platform, and exchanges with other Members provide great reference points and tools for Members like Costa Rica to identify areas where the national curricula or qualification standards differ from global standards, and then make moves to adjust them. Mapping the system and building these key relationships laid the structural groundwork for scaling, which became known as the "Costa Rica Model".



You have to see what you have to improve in teaching skills, in infrastructure, technology, and curriculum."

INA

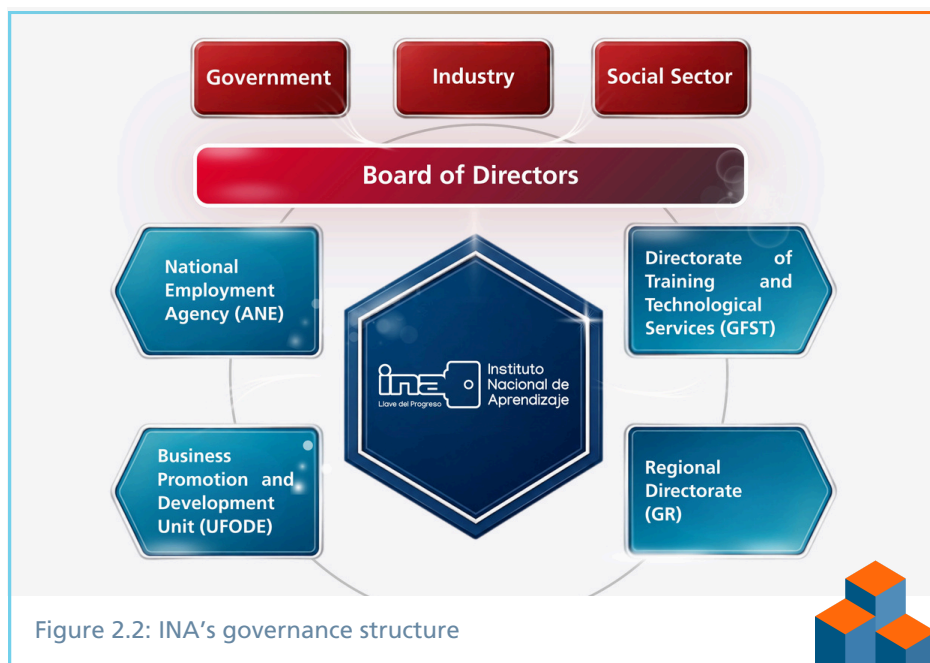
Thirdly, INA connected to Costa Rica's policies and built networks across the system.

The INA created connections at several levels: 1) by engaging with the system at a policy level; 2) by establishing mechanisms for stakeholder collaboration that inform strategic priorities; and 3) by working with leaders across the system.

INA actively works with its network of government-level decision-makers. Key policy figures and industry representatives sit on INA's board, giving WorldSkills Costa Rica a direct line into national policy. Having INA's staff sit within key organizations across the system is also an important part of building these networks, including those working on qualifications, occupational standards, curricula, and others.

Change also spreads peer to peer. Rather than pushing ideas top-down, INA works with its regional network of training centres to share ideas, update curricula, and embed new practices. It empowers directors who believe in the model to engage peers and communicate the impact of INA.





“

If we have a leader in another training centre who understands the Costa Rica Model and WorldSkills, it is great for them to talk to each other. They help us to convince other stakeholders and expand the model.”

INA

Fourthly, INA puts standards and curricula at the core.

Standards and curricula are the primary levers for achieving system-level impact in TVET systems, as they directly shape teaching, assessment, and the quality of learning. INA builds WorldSkills Occupational Standards directly into its national qualifications, curricula and training delivery. This was also INA's first practical answer to early criticism and a way to show WorldSkills brings benefits beyond medals.

The approach to do this follows four repeatable steps: identify the gap between national and international standards, build an action plan, test it through a pilot competition, then expand it regionally and nationally:

“

For example, in IT network system administration, we found out that our curricula only have two main models, but WorldSkills Standards uses four models. So we need to incorporate these other two things in our curriculum to have a student who meets international standards.”

INA

Lastly, INA showed the results, not just the medals.

Demonstrating impact is essential, both for sustaining funding and winning over stakeholders who might otherwise only see involvement with WorldSkills as the cost of competing. Costa Rica has also used international connections, including with the OECD, ILO and UNESCO-UNEVOC, to reinforce this story. The arrival of PISA-VET gave INA a stronger evidence base to bring policymakers on board:

“

[OECD] gives us also a lot of light and support here because the attention of the Minister of Education... has realized how important it is to be a part of WorldSkills.”

INA

IN SUMMARY

Costa Rica's journey shows how WorldSkills Competition experience can drive system-level change. INA moved from seeing WorldSkills as an isolated event to a strategic framework, and used its national mandate to connect with ministries, training centres, and industry. It embedded WorldSkills standards into curricula and qualifications and consistently demonstrated results to sustain support. Together, these steps have turned a competition team into a model for strengthening Costa Rica's whole technical education system.

3. WorldSkills Japan

Japan has a long-standing engagement with WorldSkills, having hosted the international Competition three times: Tokyo (1970), Osaka (1985), and Shizuoka (2007). WorldSkills Japan remains an active Member and performs at a high level in Competitions. It is represented by the Japan Vocational Ability Development Association (JAVADA), established by Japan's Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare (MHLW) under the Vocational Abilities Development Promotion Act in 1969. JAVADA organizes skills competitions and oversees the selection, training support, and sending of Competitors to international events.

JAVADA's national and prefectural structure gives it a strong governance framework for organizing regional, national and international competitions that raise the profile of TVET across the country. Aichi prefecture worked directly with MHLW to successfully bid for WorldSkills Aichi 2028, part of a growing government commitment to raising the profile of TVET.



In the end, if we hold WorldSkills Aichi 2028 and it simply ends there, then there is no meaning in it. We need to think about what kinds of things this competition will connect to in the future, and what kinds of things will remain as a legacy."

MHLW

As Japan faces demographic decline, an ageing workforce, and declining youth interest in skilled trades, developing the skilled workforce that underpins the country's competitiveness has become both a major challenge and a policy priority. Skills competitions are increasingly seen as a strategic tool to raise the profile of TVET, attract young people, and strengthen skills competitiveness.

Yet, raising the profile of TVET, manufacturing and skills trades, the objective cannot be achieved through organizing and preparing for competitions per se. For WorldSkills Japan, it lies in the attractiveness, prestige, and relevance of the curriculum, as well as a strong TVET teaching force and other factors. As Japan prepares to host the WorldSkills Competition for a fourth time, MHLW is exploring how to sustain and expand this impact and build on the legacy of previous Competitions to drive the wider skills movement.

Close Cooperation with Industry, and with the National and Prefectural Governments

The Japan Vocational Ability Development Association has created a fair and impartial abilities evaluation system, in close cooperation with industry and with the national and prefectural governments and, as a comprehensive public institution for vocational abilities development, joins the Prefectural Vocational Ability Development Association to provide a nationwide service.



Figure 3.1: Corporation structure between national and prefectural vocational ability development association



So how did Japan turn Competition performance into system-level impact?

The research identified three key things:

Firstly, Japan uses international competitions to identify gaps.

Japan's performance at WorldSkills Kazan 2019 prompted a government review of the national system. Winning the lowest number of gold medals in the country's history led the Japanese government to recognize gaps between national and international competition requirements, insufficient training and measures for selected Competitors, and a reliance on voluntary efforts from industry rather than structured government support.

This review led to increased funding and stronger government backing, including the organization of Experts across sectors to contribute to training plans. This recognition of impact extends beyond competitions themselves. MHLW is now exploring how learning from WorldSkills Shanghai 2026 could be integrated into Japan's national TVET system, particularly around legacy:



There will also be WorldSkills Shanghai in September 2026. So we would like to obtain various kinds of information. And, in particular, regarding legacy, what kind of things will be left behind for the future"

MHLW

Secondly, standards are the core for improving skills excellence.

With competitions as JAVADA's central focus, strengthening Competitors' capacity has become a key priority, and the WorldSkills Occupational Standards (WSOS) are central to preparing for and organizing competitions at every level. Subcommittees, within JAVADA and made up of sector specialists, study the relevant WSOS and use them to develop training plans and strategies for Competitors, with JAVADA providing the resources to make this possible.

The influence of WSOS extends beyond Competitor preparation into national competitions themselves. As new skills emerge internationally, Japan's national competitions are adjusted to include them, so that structure, skills mapping, and standards stay aligned with international practice.



If WorldSkills decides to introduce a new skill to be part of the competition, then the national competition would make a consideration to include that, and also adjust the occupational standards that come with the revision of present skill standards. So in that way, WorldSkills always has a direct impact on Japanese competitions."

JAVADA

Thirdly, competitions create a natural mechanism for system-level impact.

Through preparing for and organizing competitions, JAVADA built connections and networks that go on to increase cross-sector collaboration and incremental improvements in teaching, assessment, and standards. While these outcomes may not be the primary objective, they emerge naturally from the relationships that competitions create. JAVADA's governance structure also means JAVADA prepares the occupational standards, and prefectural associations dispatch delegations to competitions conducted in accordance with the standards, allowing the impact of standards to expand across all of Japan's prefectures.



We believe that by organizing skills competitions, we provide opportunities to connect policymakers, industry, and educational institutions. Through these cross-sector connections, the influence of WorldSkills naturally extends and contributes to collaboration and partnership."

JAVADA





Competitions also act as a practical entry point for national discussions on policy and help MHLW and JAVADA's subcommittees identify priority skills and training approaches.

Japan is strengthening cross-ministerial collaboration between MHLW, which oversees skills competitions and workforce development, and the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT), which is responsible for education, including primary and secondary. This will allow a more coordinated approach to promoting skills and TVET within schools.

JAVADA has also built cross-sector partnerships with industry and TVET providers, notably the Polytechnic University of Japan. Serving as WorldSkills Technical Delegates, Experts, judges and subcommittee members, they each bring insights, approaches and standards back to their institutions, which has an indirect impact on the wider Japanese TVET system.



When elementary and junior high school students receive lessons, we are considering producing supplementary educational materials. Through those materials, we would explain how the occupations featured in the skills competitions relate to various aspects of everyday life."

MHLW

IN SUMMARY

Japan's experience shows how a disappointing result at WorldSkills Kazan 2019 became a catalyst for government review and investment. The WorldSkills Occupational Standards now shape both Competitor preparation and national competitions, and the process of organizing competitions itself has built lasting networks between JAVADA, MHLW, MEXT, Polytechnic University and industry. Together, these show how the mechanics of competing can, over time, become a channel for raising the profile of TVET and shaping Japan's wider skills system.



3. WorldSkills UK

WorldSkills UK has a long-standing relationship with WorldSkills, engaging actively at both international and European level. The UK's engagement is led by the Department for Education (DfE), which funds WorldSkills UK alongside the Scottish, Welsh and Northern Irish governments. WorldSkills UK uses this funding to leverage further investment.

The UK's Official Delegate is a senior officer in the DfE, and WorldSkills UK plays a key role in bringing senior officials and ministers into international and European events. This senior engagement has helped position WorldSkills UK more closely within the UK's policy landscape. Recently, the DfE Permanent Secretary attended WorldSkills Lyon 2024 and the Skills Minister attended EuroSkills Herning 2025.



This involvement and exposure provide unique opportunities for senior government representatives to understand how the UK's skills systems benchmark against other nations...[and] can be a lever for future system change that goes beyond the 'event'.

WorldSkills UK

WorldSkills UK sees the relationship between engagement and impact as non-linear. Senior civil servants attending events did not automatically translate into policy outcomes. Instead, system-level impact has built over time through sustained efforts to build trust and credibility across the TVET system.

This is reflected in WorldSkills UK's role in recent reforms, including reviewing technical education and apprenticeship standards set by Skills England³, feeding into a new workforce development framework for further education, and shaping policy consultations such as the Curriculum and Assessment Review⁴, new V levels⁵, and the Milburn Review, an independent review of youth employment⁶. WorldSkills UK has been referenced twice in the UK's Post-16 Education and Skills White Paper⁷ and is now convening multiple government departments ahead of WorldSkills Shanghai 2026 as a unique opportunity to showcase the UK and learn from other nations' systems.



So how did WorldSkills UK build impact beyond the Competition floor?

Four key areas became apparent:

Firstly, WorldSkills UK defined the strategic value of its membership.

Rather than assuming impact follows automatically from joining WorldSkills, WorldSkills UK emphasized why engagement, including the biennial Competition, matters for driving quality across the wider skills system.



It's not a simple case of joining WorldSkills, and then these things [system change] happen. I think it's important to build a narrative around it and a context of why a biannual event can be so pivotal in terms of driving quality. "

WorldSkills UK

Secondly, WorldSkills UK built a broader mission, vision, and credibility.

WorldSkills UK was seen as having a narrower scope of work than its own vision reflected, tied closely to the competition-focused identity of WorldSkills. Shifting this perception was not easy, but from 2015 WorldSkills UK made great efforts to build a wider vision to leverage wider impacts:



We were thought of as the people who did competitions...it was seen as elitist. So in 2015, WorldSkills UK started creating a wider narrative that says, actually, this isn't just about those involved in competitions. This is about the whole UK economy."

WorldSkills UK

The credibility of this narrative rests on evidence. WorldSkills UK has invested in research to demonstrate its wider impact, partnering with NCFE, Oxford University's Centre on Skills, Knowledge and Organizational Performance (SKOPE), and the Edge Foundation to evidence its Centre of Excellence initiative as a driver of technical excellence in the skills economy⁸. Separate research with Frontier Economics found a return on investment for the taxpayer of £3.50 for every pound invested in WorldSkills UK in its central scenario, and at least £2.10 in its conservative scenario.



Another thing, [...] we did a number of research looking at the impact of the investment the government gave to us. So, looking at the return on investment, on social investment and also comparing the earning potential of students⁹ who had been through our programmes with those that hadn't, which starts to paint a picture of our impact beyond the few that win international medals."

WorldSkills UK

More recently, WorldSkills UK has refreshed its theory of change (Figure 4.1), with a sharper focus on young people and how its programmes can support their readiness to enter the workplace:

This reflects WorldSkills UK's ongoing reflection on its role within the UK TVET system, shaped by current policy priorities and facts on the ground, including rising youth NEET rates, employer perceptions of skills gaps, fewer entry-level positions, and the effect of AI on early-career roles.



Need: The skills of young people entering the workplace do not consistently match those required by employers and are not keeping pace with the changing needs of employers and industry

Vision: Young people have the skills to thrive in a dynamic UK economy

Purpose: We provide transformative opportunities that accelerate young people's skills and readiness to enter the workplace so they can thrive in the world of work

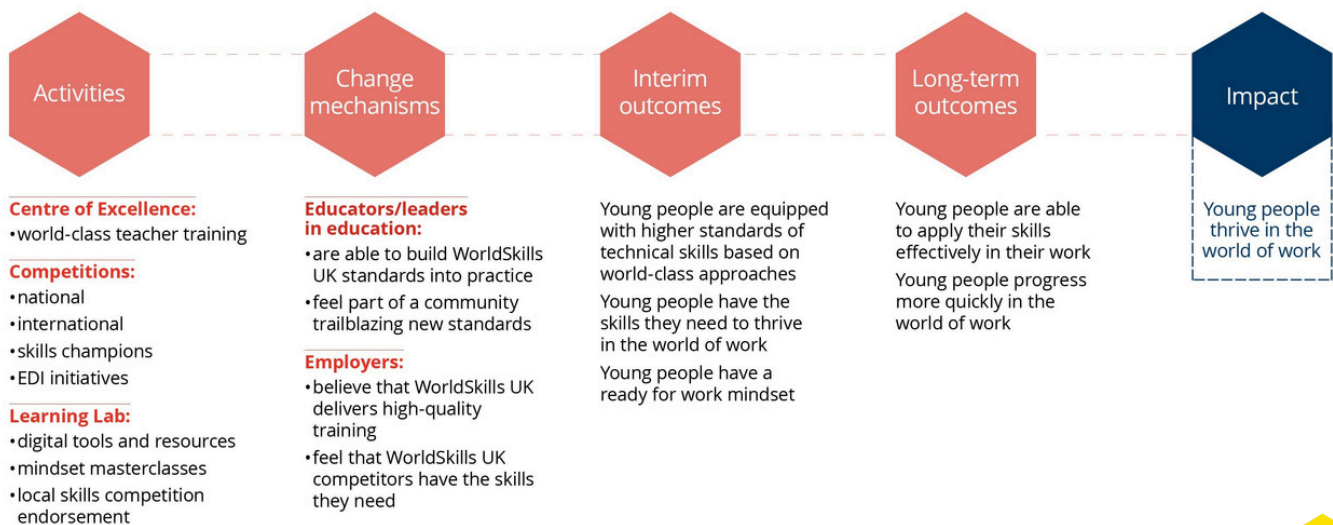


Figure 4.1: WorldSkills UK Theory of Change (updated in 2026)

Thirdly, WorldSkills UK built aligned understanding of its methodologies and benefits.

A key part has been to help stakeholders and partners understand the WorldSkills methodologies to leverage system-level impact. For example, as part of the lead up to Shanghai, WorldSkills UK hosted meetings with civil servants to introduce WorldSkills methodologies and explain how engagement with the WorldSkills movement can support skills development, improving standards, and policy innovation:

Bringing stakeholders on board with WorldSkills methodologies involves skilled communication that showcases their relevance, benefits, and potential impacts. This process was summarized by WorldSkills UK as engaging both 'hearts and minds', combining powerful lived experiences and success stories with robust evidence and data to build credibility:



I think the minds bit is needing to do research and collect data and have evidence points to share with people. But the hearts bit is getting people to come and see competitions and see the faces of the young people who are dedicated and going through it... But you need the substance to back it up. It's about flash and substance."

WorldSkills UK

This work is also about encouraging partners to become advocates for the approach themselves and expand alignment across the sector. Competitors in particular are powerful advocates for this. Their experiences highlight that WorldSkills is not only about competitions and winning medals, but also about longer-term outcomes such as career development, workforce development, and improved life trajectories.



It's easy to ask them to talk about how WorldSkills has put them on a stage, but actually, we need them to talk about what they've added to their company, or how they're now training the next squad. We've got a person in our team who's looking after that and creating that skill set within them to be able to tell that story that then links back to policy."

WorldSkills UK





Finally, WorldSkills UK has taken a deliberate approach to leadership.

Positioning WorldSkills UK beyond a competition-focused role has not always been welcomed by stakeholders holding earlier assumptions. This same resistance to change was mentioned by Costa Rica in developing and expanding the Costa Rica Model. It requires a leadership team to have a readiness to tackle pushback and to have confidence that what they are doing is right and will bring long-term benefits for the organization and the TVET system:



I think there's an element of confidence in this as well. And I think you've got to be confident in what you're asserting as you're developing it, because you've really got to push that envelope"

WorldSkills UK

IN SUMMARY

WorldSkills UK's experience shows how system-level impact can be built through sustained, deliberate effort rather than single moments of engagement. By defining the strategic value of its membership, broadening its mission beyond competitions, building aligned understanding across government and the sector, and showing confident leadership in the face of resistance, WorldSkills UK has become a trusted and credible voice in the UK's skills system, able to convene government departments and help shape national policy.



5. Dimensions for driving impacts

These three Member case studies highlight different approaches and pathways taken by Members, influenced by their governance structure, national contexts, capacities, and institutional positioning. Analysis of this research by the Global Research Council and Oxford University has surfaced a set of considerations for other WorldSkills Members, as reference for their own work within their national TVET systems. The case studies may also make system-level impact sound neat and simple, but the reality is complex, difficult and non-linear, involving trade-offs and competing priorities. Members should approach the following points with caution and with consideration of this real-world complexity.

The seven common dimensions are:

1. The strategic value of engagement with WorldSkills and skills competitions

Members may benefit from reflecting on what engagement with WorldSkills means in their own context, including how competitions and activities beyond competitions can support national TVET development priorities. This research, together with previous research¹⁰, shows that a more deliberate, strategic approach can extend impacts beyond the events themselves, including strengthened standards, stakeholder relationships, and the prestige of TVET and skills careers.

In Japan, competitions brought together training providers, industry experts and other stakeholders to develop training plans for Competitors. All three cases also illustrate how engaging with WorldSkills Occupational Standards informed curriculum development, national standards, teaching approaches, and training equipment and infrastructure.

2. Placing Competitors, Experts, trainers and teachers at the centre of impact

Competitors, Experts, trainers and teachers emerged as central actors in generating and sustaining the impacts of engagement with WorldSkills. Competitors acquire new technical and soft skills, professional networks and experiences that shape their subsequent education and career pathways, while Experts, teachers and trainers are exposed to new standards and practices that transfer into teaching, assessment and curriculum development. In Costa Rica, INA focused on learners' skills development. In the UK, WorldSkills UK's new theory of change focused on young people thriving in the world of work. And in Japan, JAVADA coordinated resources to help Competitors match international benchmarks. Competitors also acted as powerful advocates, making WorldSkills impact more visible than institutional narratives.

3. Standards as a core tool for impact

WorldSkills Occupational Standards (WSOS) emerged as a central mechanism translating engagement with WorldSkills into wider system-level impacts across all three cases. Instead of serving solely as technical specifications for competitions, the WSOS provided a reference point for quality, skills excellence, curriculum, teaching and infrastructure. In Costa Rica, INA integrated the WSOS into curricula, teaching practices, assessments and equipment specifications across 22 skills areas. In the UK, WSOS informed the Centre of Excellence and the framework for apprenticeship standards and assessment. However, as international standards, the WorldSkills Occupational Standards provide a valuable global reference point that may need to be contextualized to reflect national qualifications, industry practices, labour market needs, and educational contexts.



4. System dynamics and organizational positioning

Members' capacity to influence system-level impact is shaped by their role, remit and coordinating capabilities within their national TVET systems. In Japan, JAVADA's framework aligns standards, training content and assessment across sectors, enabling knowledge diffusion. In Costa Rica, INA's engagement with the Ministry of Public Education, SINAFOR, SINEFOTEF and the National Qualification Framework helped position WorldSkills standards and competitions as tools for quality improvement.

5. Stakeholder alignment across the system

Stakeholder engagement and alignment emerged as an important mechanism for extending WorldSkills' influence beyond Competitions. Members engaged policymakers, training providers, social partners, industry representatives and sectoral bodies, building sustained, formalized relationships that offered a stronger basis for cross-sector collaboration. In Japan, Polytechnic University professors and industry specialists helped develop training plans for Competitors. In Costa Rica, INA established governance mechanisms involving policymakers and industry, aligning activities with national priorities. In the UK, WorldSkills UK convened multiple government departments ahead of WorldSkills Shanghai 2026. These relationships serve as channels for knowledge, resources and influence to flow into the wider TVET system.

6 The role of success stories and impact research in gaining stakeholder buy-in

Evidence emerged as an important mechanism for demonstrating the value of engagement with WorldSkills and obtaining stakeholder buy-in, including success stories, estimates of impact on curriculum, employment outcomes, and return on investment. However, resource constraints can make it challenging for Members to conduct such evaluations. In Japan, JAVADA used Competitors' success stories to enhance the attractiveness of skills careers. In Costa Rica, INA used evidence of curriculum improvements to convince sceptical stakeholders. In the UK, WorldSkills UK highlighted that combining stories with robust evidence is particularly effective.

7. The role of leadership at different levels of the system in enabling impact

Leadership emerged as an important factor in enabling the wider impacts of engagement with WorldSkills. It involved revisiting organizational strategy, convening stakeholders, and coordinating resources. Leadership is not confined to the Members themselves. Impact was often enabled through leadership distributed across the system, with Competitors, training centre directors, teachers, industry partners and policymakers championing activities and translating learning into practice. In Costa Rica, INA worked with leaders within their regional training centres. In the UK, WorldSkills UK engaged industry and training provider leaders as advocates. And in Japan, Experts on competition committees contributed their knowledge.



Acknowledgements

This report is prepared by Dr Yushan Xie and Professor James Robson at Oxford University Centre on Skills, Knowledge, and Organizational Performance (SKOPE). Yushan Xie is a Postdoctoral Fellow at the Department of Education, University of Oxford. James Robson is Director of SKOPE and Associate Professor of Tertiary Education Systems.

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Endnotes

- 1 See previous report on system-level change: https://worldskills.org/what/projects/wsgrc_research_analysis/
- 2 The six focus areas were proposed in the WorldSkills General Assembly in 2016 as part of Vision 2025 planning. You can read more here: <https://worldskills.org/about/worldskills-vision-2025/>
- 3 Skills England is an executive agency of the Department for Work and Pensions formally established in 2025. It aims to work with partners to create better skills for better jobs, enabling growth and opportunity. See more details at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/skills-england>
- 4 See more details of the Curriculum and Assessment Review at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/curriculum-and-assessment-review-final-report>
- 5 See more details of new V levels at: <https://educationhub.blog.gov.uk/2026/03/new-v-levels-and-post-16-qualifications-explained/>
- 6 This is an independent review of the increase in the number of young people who are not in education, employment or training (NEET). See more details at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/young-people-and-work-interim-report>

- 7 See more details of the Post-16 education and skills white paper at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/post-16-education-and-skills-white-paper>
- 8 See more details on page 6 of the report at: <https://www.worldskillsuk.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/03/The-economic-value-of-worldskills-uk-2023.pdf>
- 9 See the report 'Earnings and Employment Effects of WorldSkills UK Competitions' at: <https://www.worldskillsuk.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/09/Earnings-and-employment-effects-of-Worldskills-UK-competitions-final-050424.pdf>



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