

تمكين
Tamkeen

Retail Sector

Skills Report 2024

مهارات البحرين
Skills Bahrain

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Content Disclaimer

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Executive Summary

The retail sector's workforce is the largest in Bahrain, employing over 130,000 professionals across various industry subsectors in 2023. Consumer trends and behavior dictate the evolution and direction of the market with products constantly changing and retailers innovating new ways to deliver on customer experience, enabled by technology. Technology today has empowered the consumer with instant access to information and has provided companies with an enormous amount of data to bridge the gaps between what the customer wants and what the retailer has to offer. Companies with the right capabilities to analyze data are able to pivot quickly and efficiently to gain a significant competitive advantage over other retailers.

With the growing shift towards e-commerce, retailers are leveraging their traditional brick and mortar outlets to provide consumers with an experience that will attract them towards buying their brand's products instore or through their e-commerce platform. Employers are looking to hire and train talent who are committed to the brand and can gain experience, allowing them to progress into managerial roles.

As we navigate to meet the industry workforce demands, critical skills gaps must be addressed to accommodate the progress of the sector. Employers in the retail sector have indicated that core skills are the focus of retail candidate interviews, particularly in the front-of-house roles. Employers are specifically looking for employees who possess strong communication skills and demonstrate adaptability to keep up with the spontaneity and day-to-day challenges that arise in the retail sector. Whilst the industry primarily focuses on the development of core skills, employees who have gained deep product expertise and have a strong commercial awareness or business acumen are well positioned for career progression. Moreover, the rise in technology has led to the requirements of data analytical skills to extract crucial insights and support informed decision making.

As the retail sector continues to grow and evolve, the demand for talent will likely follow, with retailers in Bahrain focused on employing local talent. Individuals focused on developing a foundation of core skills and complementing it with the knowledge of the technical skill requirements are in a strong position to excel in the industry and build a successful career.

Introduction & Purpose

Purpose

This report serves as a resource for individuals, organizations, and professionals intending to or currently operating in the retail sector. Its primary aim is to provide a clear understanding of both the current and future skills landscape within the sector, reflecting the views and insights from industry representatives alongside comprehensive secondary research. The report identifies emerging trends,

highlights the evolving nature of jobs and career opportunities in the sector, and outlines critical skills required to enhance the workforce's alignment with industry needs. Additionally, it provides an overview of the various educational pathways and training programs available to embark on or advance a career within the retail sector.

Intended Audience

Individuals

Provides insights into sector trends, jobs and skills in demand, as well as relevant trainings and programs, aiding in informed career planning.



Employers

Provides insights into sector trends, current and emerging skills landscape, and relevant trainings to guide workforce planning.

Academia & Training Providers

Provides insights to support curriculum and training program development in alignment with industry needs.

Methodology

Research Methodology

A robust and systematic approach was followed with several key research activities, starting with an international benchmarking exercise to implement best practices in the development of a sector skills report. This initial step, in addition to guidelines from the International Labour Organization (ILO), informed the design of the engagement methodology outlined in the following section.

Extensive desktop research established an understanding of the current landscape within Bahrain's retail sector, and a review of Bahrain's Government strategies – including the Economic Recovery Plan – ensured alignment of findings with national strategic priorities. Economic and labor market data were sourced from official Governmental sources.

Engagement with sector representatives (see 'Engagement Methodology') provided the core insights into the sector's specific dynamics and requirements embedded throughout the report. The findings from these research activities were consolidated into the sector skills report, which serves as a valuable resource for individuals, employers, academic institutions, and training providers.

Engagement Methodology

To gather critical insights, a Sector Working Group was formed, serving as a collaborative platform for engagement and knowledge exchange. The Sector Working Group aimed to uncover trends, opportunities, and challenges within the sector, and to identify the skills gaps in the workforce.

This group included a diverse array of stakeholders and experts from both local and regional contexts, encompassing representatives from small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), as well as large companies, academic institutions, and vocational training centers. This approach ensures the Sector Working Group is representative of the sector and captures a comprehensive view of the sector and its workforce needs.

Over a period of 6 weeks, from January to March 2024, a series of workshops were conducted with the active participation of over 25 representatives from 4 distinct job families covering the retail value chain in Bahrain. These collaborative sessions were crucial in validating job demands and career pathways in the retail sector, drawing on the collective insights of the Sector Working Group members.

The contributions of the Sector Working Group were instrumental in the development of a skills framework that is specifically tailored to Bahrain's retail sector. The insights and findings from the Sector Working Group's engagement have been thoroughly integrated into this report, offering detailed guidance and strategic recommendations for the sector's development.

Sector Overview

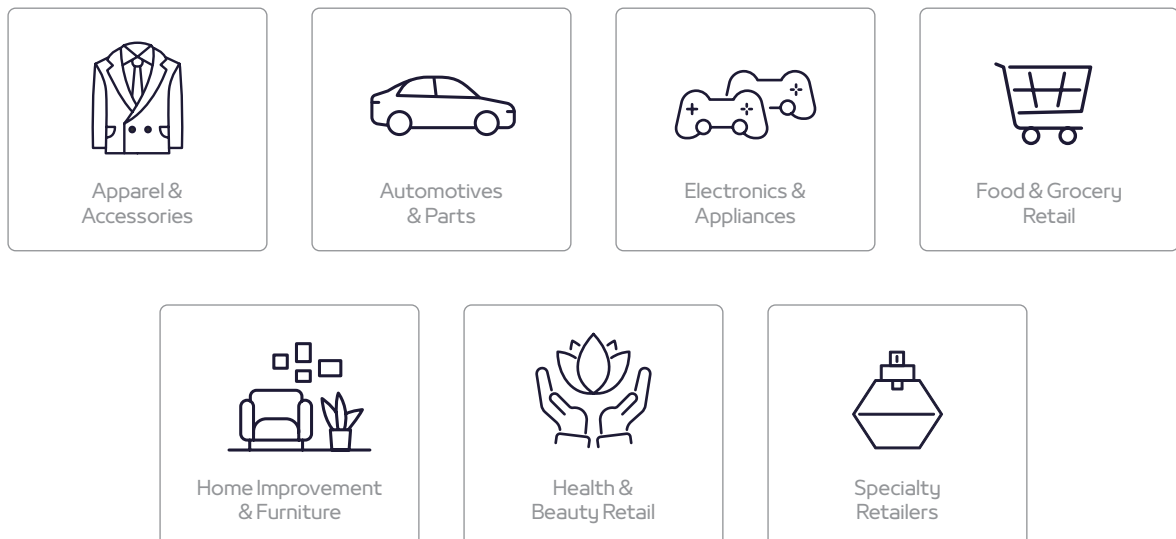
The retail sector is one of Bahrain's thriving and growing sectors, experiencing a 7% year-over-year national real GDP growth in 2023. E-commerce transactions are on the rise with a growth rate of 5.6%.¹ whilst new businesses are opening up, solidifying retail as one of the fastest growing non-oil sectors in Bahrain, contributing 4% to the country's GDP.

The sector is a major job creator in Bahrain and positioned as the largest employer in the private sector. The employment rate in retail accounts for approximately 23% of the total private sector workforce as of Q2 2023, which emphasizes the importance of the sector in creating considerable job opportunities for Bahraini talent.

The sector as a whole is primarily regulated by the Ministry of Industry and Commerce (MOIC). In 2019, the MOIC launched a national strategy for e-commerce with the objective of creating a solid e-commerce ecosystem through enhanced standards and favorable regulations. The strategy looked to empower SMEs and their export competitiveness, as well as attracting international companies to enter and invest in the local market.

Retail falls under the "Sale/trading activities including repair of vehicles and motorcycles" economic activity, classified by the MOIC. The scope of this report is narrowed to the sale and trade of retail goods, excluding wholesale, services, and products related to other industries. The sector is comprised of seven subsectors that represent the majority of companies in the market.

Bahrain's Retail Subsectors



¹ Central Bank of Bahrain, "CBB Statistical Bulletin March 2023". Accessed May 2024: (<https://www.cbb.gov.bh/publications/>)

Employers in Bahrain's Retail Sectors

Employers in Bahrain's retail sector range from up-and-coming homegrown brands to major global chains. The presence of local brands is especially significant in sectors such as fashion and jewelry where they often incorporate elements of Bahraini tradition and culture into their offerings, tailoring them to the taste of the local market. The rise in global e-commerce has expanded the market reach of local businesses, providing easy access to regional consumers.

On the other end, international retail chains in Bahrain – often represented by agents, traditionally through family groups – play a big role in introducing global retail practices and innovations into the local market. These global employers raise the competitive bar and challenge local retailers to elevate their standards in terms of product quality, customer service, and operational efficiency. International chains offer a range of career opportunities where employees benefit from structured career progression in an environment aligned with global benchmarks.

The retail scene in Bahrain is diversified, comprising both traditional brick-and-mortar stores as well as online retail platforms, which have been catalyzed during the COVID-19 pandemic. Consumer habits have evolved leading to the widespread adoption of technology to continue to serve consumers and remain competitive. E-commerce in Bahrain grew by 43% from BHD 1 billion in 2021 to BHD 1.43 billion in 2023, underlining the growing consumer shift towards digital shopping experiences.¹

With that said, physical retail stores are not a thing of the past – far from it. We continue to see new commercial complexes being constructed and thriving, attracting local residents as well as tourists. Prime examples include the expansion of the Avenues shopping mall and the newly launched Marassi Galleria – Bahrain's largest mall at 110,000+ square meters, providing over 10,000 new employment opportunities. These projects offer visitors an integrated experience of shopping, dining, and entertainment, setting a new standard for the retail sector at a local and regional level.



¹Central Bank of Bahrain, "CBB Statistical Bulletin March 2023". Accessed May 2024: (<https://www.cbb.gov.bh/publications/>)

The Retail sector in Numbers

GDP Contribution



4%

As of 2023, the Wholesale and retail trade sector contributed **4% to the Kingdom's real GDP**¹

Employment



130,549

As of Q2 2023, the sector employed **130,549 employees**², surpassing the construction sector as the largest employer in Bahrain.

Foreign Direct Investment



BHD 738.2

In 2023, the sector contributed around 4.6% of total FDI stock, attracting **BHD 738.19Mn**. The Wholesale and Retail Trade sector recorded flows of **BHD 29.9Mn** during the year.¹

¹ Source: Information & eGovernment Authority

² Source: Social Insurance Organization released by LMRA. Data represents economic activity "Sale/Trading Activities, repair of motor vehicles and motorcycles."

Retail Sector Trends

Globally, retail is changing constantly. Products, trends, consumer behavior and technology introduce a level of dynamism and excitement in the sector which is the reason why so many people are fascinated by the industry. COVID-19 will go down in history as a significant event that has catalyzed e-commerce sales and changed consumer behavior globally (at least for now). The rise and democratization of technological advancement has allowed many businesses to introduce an additional digital sales avenue, with storefronts increasingly used to deliver an experience that gives the customer a 'feel' for the product before the sale takes place online later on. The new generation of consumers are tech savvy, but also more conscious of material sourcing, production processes, and brand ethos, resulting in a deeper desire to ensure brands are aligned with their values prior to purchasing. Sophisticated data keeps companies informed on who their customers are and what they are spending time on, which allows brands to adopt a tailored approach to engage with customers and maximize reach.

Omni channel Retail: Blending the Digital and Physical Shopping Experience

The rise of omnichannel retail represents a new standard in consumer shopping experiences. The trend goes beyond traditional borders of online versus physical stores to create a frictionless, cohesive shopping experience that meets customers where they are—in-aisle, online, or on a mobile. The modern retailer focuses on delivering a brand experience with a consistent level of convenience, and personalized interaction offered at every touchpoint. Omnichannel leverages the strengths of the two channels—the tangibility of the physical stores with a convenient, deep access to digital product information. Customers are able to research products online, test or sample them physically in-store, and then choose their preferred and most convenient method of purchase, providing customers with the ultimate shopping experience.

Retailers in Bahrain have already adopted this approach and management no longer evaluates the performance of a store purely based on store profitability. Whilst a large portion of revenue still comes from the physical store, the vast majority of local retailers have built a strong digital presence (primarily through websites and social media), and have created partnerships with logistics companies to open up new sales channels. Retailers have also invested in new technologies such as virtual reality (VR) and augmented reality (AR) to allow for a more immersive customer experience to drive sales. Brands like IKEA offer their "IKEA Home Smart" app which allows users to virtually place furniture in their homes before purchasing, solving a common problem across consumers that are hesitant to purchase furniture prior to visualizing if it aligns with the aesthetics of their space. Sephora has also introduced augmented reality technology to allow consumers to virtually try on makeup using their smartphones, enabling customers with a "try before you buy" experience, purely online.



Case study: The transformation of Best Buy, Minnesota, United States.

Best Buy's transformation from a struggling brick-and-mortar retailer to a thriving omnichannel powerhouse serves as a compelling case study in retail adaptation. Facing significant challenges due to the rise of online shopping, Best Buy knew they had to adapt their operations or risk the fate of bankruptcy. Management had to ride the e-commerce wave and invested heavily in enhancing their digital platforms to offer customers a seamless online experience.

Best Buy also had an advantage over other retailers – location, location, location! The company had one of the widest physical store networks in the US that can be leveraged to offer customers with a differentiated experience from purely digital retailers. Management focused on

the customer and deployed a strategy that placed customer service as a fundamental pillar of its business model. The company ensured they offered the highest level of technical support and guidance through the introduction of the Geek Squad and the "Blue Shirts" which became a symbol of expertise.

The strategic shift to a differentiated omnichannel experience reversed declining sales and positioned Best Buy as a trusted retailer that guides customers to make an informed purchase. The success of Best Buy underscores the importance of adaptability, customer-centricity, and the integration of online and offline channels in today's retail landscape.

The Rise of the Conscious Consumer

In addition to changes to the consumer's shopping habits, retailers are also navigating a shift in behavior amongst the new generation of customers. Consumers today have more access to information than any other generation in history. The new generation of buyers is highly influenced by social media which means demand for products is no longer solely driven by the quality or price. There is a growing interest and curiosity amongst customers on alternative factors such as environmental, ethical and localized sourcing of products, whilst personal or political interests are also having a much larger impact on purchasing decisions. Companies are focusing resources on aligning their supply chain network with the interests of their customers, resulting in increased transparency to satisfy the 'conscious consumer'.

The desire for local products and interest in sustainability is being seen in the retail sector throughout Bahrain. For instance, supermarket chains have dedicated sections exclusively for the sale of local produce to promote and support local retailers. The government has also created hugely successful initiatives such as the Bahrain Farmers Market to support local producers and cater to consumer demand. Moreover, the government has taken additional sustainable measures by issuing a ban on selling, manufacturing, circulating and importing single-use plastic bags (that are less than 35 microns in thickness), encouraging retailers and consumers to shift to eco-friendly substitutes.

Data-driven everything

Despite the behavioral changes mentioned, companies today understand their consumers more than ever because of the advancements in technology and the availability of data. Data is becoming the heart of the sector impacting almost every function and division in the retail industry. Decision-making is data-driven and has shifted everything from an art into a science, maximizing the efficiency and profitability of organizations. The ability to collect and analyze data at every step of the customer journey has allowed retailers to know exactly who their customers are and offer relevant products that meet their needs.

Data is primarily being used in Bahrain's retail space to effectively acquire customers through social media and online advertising. Retailers have the ability to specify who their target market is (age, gender, location, interests etc.) and pay for sponsored ads specifically aimed – with incredible precision – towards their target market. Companies that have this expertise are able to effectively spend their marketing budget to target customers and achieve the highest conversion rates. Moreover, companies in Bahrain are also using data in-store to accurately manage inventory and streamline merchandising. With supply chain disruptions rippling through the market in recent years, managing stock effectively is becoming a priority in retail. Companies today are seeking employees with the right skill set to be able to analyze data and make decisions accordingly.



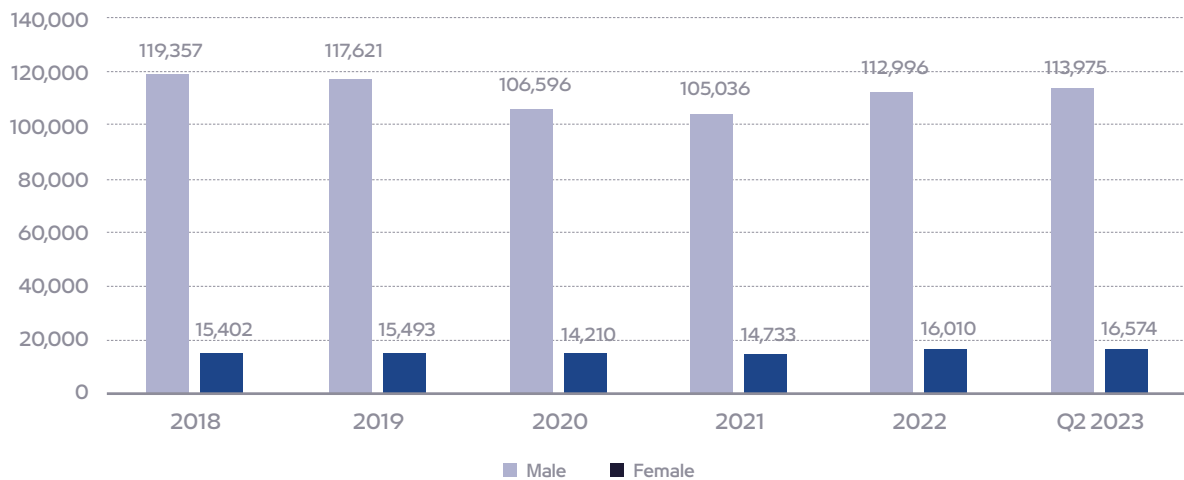
Career Opportunities

The retail sector is considered the largest employer when compared to other sectors, responsible for the employment of over 130,000 professionals. The retail sector today is extremely diverse with over 110,000 expatriate employees, offering professionals the opportunity to work in a multi-cultural environment with a broad set of global perspectives, allowing the workforce to enrich their skill set and create an impact in the industry.

The workforce today is male dominated, accounting for approximately 87% of the total retail workforce.

The Sector Working Group has recognized the need to increase female participation in the workforce, particularly in retail operations. A more gender-balanced and well-rounded workforce can contribute towards a better understanding of customers to offer an enhanced overall experience. Whilst the inclusivity of females in the sector primarily requires a shift in mindset towards a career in retail, employers should also increase their engagement with female employees in retail to better understand their needs and create a work environment that is more suitable for females.

Figure 1: Retail Sector Workforce Breakdown by Gender (2018- Q2 2023)



Source: Labour Market Regulatory Authority (LMRA). Social Insurance Organization (SIO).

*Note: Figures reflect Sale/Trading Activities; repair of motor vehicles and motorcycles

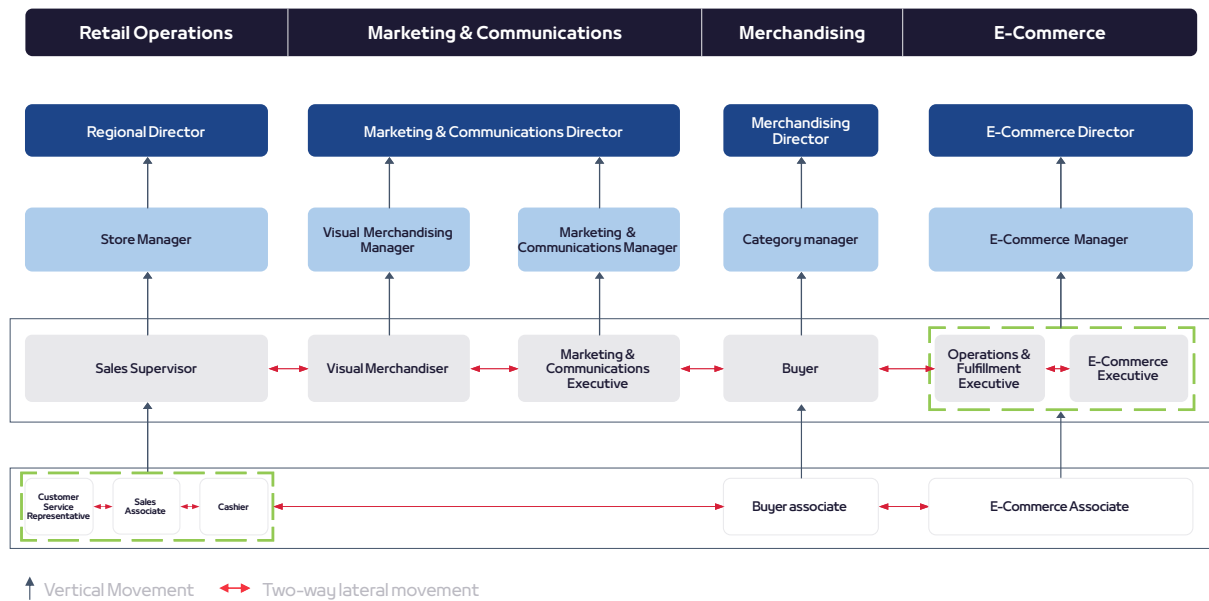
Career Opportunities in Bahrain's Retail Sector

Many opportunities exist in the retail sector and companies are always on the lookout for talent in front and back of-house operations.

Front of house refers to any customer-facing employees who are usually found in-store and refers to positions such as customer service representatives, sales associates and cashiers. These exciting roles are suited to people who enjoy the daily interactions with people and a passion for customer excellence and sales. Employees who excel in front of house operations are often extroverts by nature and have strong social intelligence skills.

Back-of-house functions are the engine of the retail sector and are responsible for sourcing products, raising brand and product awareness and ensuring fulfillment of digital orders. These functions encompass roles in marketing, merchandising and e-commerce, which have been expanding in recent years with the growing emphasis on e-commerce and omnichannel retailing. Professionals now need to demonstrate proficiency in digital competencies and are required to have strong analytical skills, since data now drives the decision making in the sector.

Figure 2: Retail sector job families



↑ Vertical Movement ↔ Two-way lateral movement

* The Career Map serves as a reference to reflect the available job roles and possible career pathways in the sector, which may vary depending on each organisation's structure and business context.

The career progression pathways would depend on individual performance, capability, experience, aspiration, as well as organisation needs.

The retail sector career pathway illustrates a dynamic industry that has a variety of opportunities for individuals. Job roles at entry or mid-levels allow flexibility and promote lateral career progression opportunities for employees keen to explore various paths within the retail sector. As individuals gain

seniority, career shifts are less common, but still possible, as employees often look to hone their expertise and pursue leadership roles. Professionals are encouraged to utilize the National Occupational Standards to identify the upskilling requirements needed to facilitate their career progression.

Jobs in demand

The Sector Working Group provided market insights into the retail jobs in demand with a particular focus on local talent. Enthusiastic and high performing employees have a clear career path into lucrative management roles in a global industry with the requirement of an important prerequisite – experience. Particularly in retail operations, employees need to understand the customer and live the dynamics of selling a product or a service to excel at a managerial role.

The traditional roles of sales associates, cashiers, and customer service representatives are merging into a comprehensive role often referred to as the customer experience associate. This convergence is happening in retail outlets around the world as technology is eliminating the need for manual processes (such as self-checkout) and hence, store employees are expected to shift their focus on delivering a seamless and exceptional experience. In Bahrain, while these roles still remain largely segregated, employers often view these positions interchangeably and require employees to gain experience in all three to develop their skill set in preparation for supervisory roles.

High performing customer experience associates can progress into various supervisory positions depending on the organization and eventually become store managers. The Sector Working Group has highlighted a gap in recruiting local talent for management positions within retail operations, stemming down to a limited pipeline of customer experience associates who have acquired the right proficiency and skill set to embrace supervisory responsibilities.

With the complexity of modern retail operations and the “new norm” of supply chain disruptions, supply chain specialists (referred to as merchandising in the retail sector) are now sought by employers, according to the Sector Working Group. The merchandising job family encompasses roles with varying seniority, from buyer associates responsible for selecting and purchasing stock, to merchandising directors who have a more strategic role. The Sector Working Group has indicated

Case study: Apple front of house¹

The traditional front-of-house roles are changing as more and more companies use technology to streamline operations, pushing their employees to focus on customer experience instead.

Apple stands out as a pioneer in this shift having defined these roles into a combined customer-focused role to give the customer (in the words of Steve Jobs) and ‘insanely great experience’. Instead of hiring for separate positions like cashiers, sales associates, and customer service representatives, Apple employs “Specialists.” These Specialists are responsible for delivering a high standard of customer experience with the specific responsibilities of delivering on all three traditional customer facing roles.

With the current trajectory of technology, we can expect to see more companies – primarily with the leading global brands – follow the same direction as Apple and adopt a similar approach focused on customer experience.

that opportunities exist for individuals with supply chain expertise to build a promising career in retail.

The consistent rise in online shopping is causing a demand for e-commerce executives within the retail sector, according to the Sector Working Group. Digital sales are becoming a sizable part of the company’s revenue mix and companies are looking for individuals with the right skills to add value, maximize online conversion and enhance the digital shopping experience. In Bahrain, e-commerce executives work very closely with operations and fulfilment executives, and have the potential to progress in their careers into more senior and strategic e-commerce role, depending on the size of organization and the volume of digital business.¹

¹ Careers at Apple, “US - Specialist: Full-Time, Part-Time, and Part-Time Temporary”. Accessed May 2024: (<https://jobs.apple.com/en-us/details/114438158/us-specialist-full-time-part-time-and-part-time-temporary>)

Figure 3: Jobs anticipated by the Sector Working Group to be in demand.

Job in demand	Job overview
Customer Experience Associate (Sales Associates/ Cashiers/ Customer Service Representatives)	<p>Sales Associates, Cashiers and Customer Service Representatives are front-of-house representatives and crucial to the retail industry. Today, these roles are often rotated within organizations and new hires need to demonstrate the skills of a “customer experience associate” that covers the technical skills of all three roles. These roles contribute to customer satisfaction, operational efficiency, and the overall success of the business.</p>
Store Managers	<p>Store Managers are responsible for leading the physical retail stores. They oversee the day to day operations of the store ensuring smooth functionality. This role demands strong leadership, operational expertise, and the ability to inspire and motivate teams.</p>
Supply Chain Specialists	<p>Supply Chain Specialists (part of the Merchandising job family) are responsible for getting products from suppliers into the store or warehouse. They manage the end-to-end supply chain process ensuring a smooth flow of products, meeting consumer demand while maximizing operational efficiency. The Sector Working Group has highlighted limited availability of talents across all levels of seniority within supply chain.</p>
E-Commerce Executives	<p>E-Commerce Executives focus on enhancing customer experience, executing order fulfillment, and maintaining e-commerce technology and infrastructure. Technology-savvy individuals often succeed in this role demonstrating the ability to collaborate effectively and thrive under pressure. This role is a key contributor to the growth of e-commerce platforms and channels.</p>



Career Spotlight

Career Spotlight: E-COMMERCE MANAGER

Role Overview

An E-Commerce Manager in the retail sector spearheads the growth and operational effectiveness of an organization's online sales platform. The job focuses on enhancing the customer experience, optimizing order fulfilment, and maintaining cutting-edge technology infrastructure. An E-Commerce Manager is responsible for a variety of tasks such as generating actionable insights from data, managing relationships with business partners, and leading digital marketing initiatives. These responsibilities can involve developing and implementing e-commerce campaigns, overseeing promotional activities, and maintaining IT systems to help their team achieve sales and performance targets.

Career Pathway and Progression

In the retail sector, a typical career path for an E-Commerce Manager starts with roles such as E-Commerce Associate, where the focus may be on managing online content and learning basic digital marketing skills. A degree is not required for this job role, however, employers value candidates with a bachelor's degree in fields like business administration, marketing, information technology, or other related fields. As an individual progresses, they can move up to positions like E-Commerce Executive or Operations and Fulfillment Executive, eventually leading to the role of E-Commerce Manager. Progression from the role of E-Commerce Manager can lead to E-Commerce Director, which involves supervisory duties and strategic campaign management. Continuous learning, technological adaptability, and leadership development are essential throughout this career trajectory.



Career Spotlight: VISUAL MERCHANTISER

Role Overview

A Visual Merchandiser in the retail sector aims to enhance the shopping experience by creating visually appealing store displays and layouts that highlight the store's products. Visual Merchandisers are responsible for the strategic placement and aesthetic presentation of merchandise. Visual Merchandisers design eye-catching displays that attract customers and drive sales to heighten brand recognition. Individuals that pursue the role of Visual Merchandiser typically have a blend of creativity, strategic thinking, and an ability to understand consumer behaviour.

Career Pathway and Progression

Becoming a Visual Merchandiser starts with a focus on gaining hands-on experience in setting up displays and understanding store layouts. With experience, individuals may advance to a Visual Merchandising Manager role, taking on more responsibility for larger projects, more complex designs, and overseeing a team. Experienced professionals can reach executive roles like Marketing and Communications Director, focusing on strategic brand implementation and creative direction across the business.



Career Spotlight:

SALES ASSOCIATE CASHIER / CUSTOMER SERVICE REPRESENTATIVE

Role Overview

A Sales Associate is tasked with driving sales, providing quality service, and maintaining operational standards in a retail environment. A Cashier handles the efficient processing of transactions at the point of sale, ensuring a smooth checkout experience. A Customer Service Representative focuses on fostering a positive customer experience through direct engagement, managing inquiries, resolving issues, and offering detailed product and service information.

The roles of Sales Associate, Cashier, and Customer Service Representative are increasingly being combined into a unified position aimed at enhancing customer experience. Many retailers are adopting rotational programs that allow employees to alternate between these roles, cultivating a versatile skill set applicable across various customer interactions. This approach broadens employees' capabilities and enhances their career development opportunities.

All three positions share essential skills, including effective communication with customers, order fulfilment, and a thorough understanding of the store's products, promotions, and policies. These integrated roles are designed to create a cohesive shopping experience, positioning employees to better meet the evolving needs of customers.

Career Pathway and Progression

A career in retail operations typically starts with entry-level roles such as Sales Associate, Cashier, and Customer Service Representative, where foundational skills in sales, customer service, and basic operations are developed. Individuals may then advance to Sales Supervisor, managing teams and refining their leadership and operational skills. The next step is Store Manager, overseeing the store's overall operations and financial performance. High achievers in this role can aspire to become Regional Directors, with responsibility for multiple stores and strategic regional objectives, demonstrating a clear path of career development from ground-level operations to senior management.



Career Spotlight: REGIONAL DIRECTOR

Role Overview

The Regional Director in the retail sector, also known as a Country Manager or Market Manager, oversees the operations of multiple stores within a specific country or region. This executive is responsible for steering the strategic direction and operational execution across the stores, ensuring that business opportunities are maximized and operational efficiencies are achieved. The role demands managing sales performance, risk, compliance, and promoting a culture of service excellence and innovation. Regional Directors are responsible for team productivity, franchise management, and budget allocation, while also managing property and infrastructure planning.

Career Pathway and Progression

The career progression for a Regional Director in the retail sector typically starts with a role as a Customer Service Representative, Sales Associate, or Cashier, where foundational skills in sales, customer service, and operations are developed. As an individual gains experience and enhances their core and technical skill set, they can progress to Sales Supervisor, and then Store Manager, with responsibilities expanding to oversee employees and store operations. Finally, obtaining the role of Regional Director, where an individual oversees all store operations within a specific country or region.



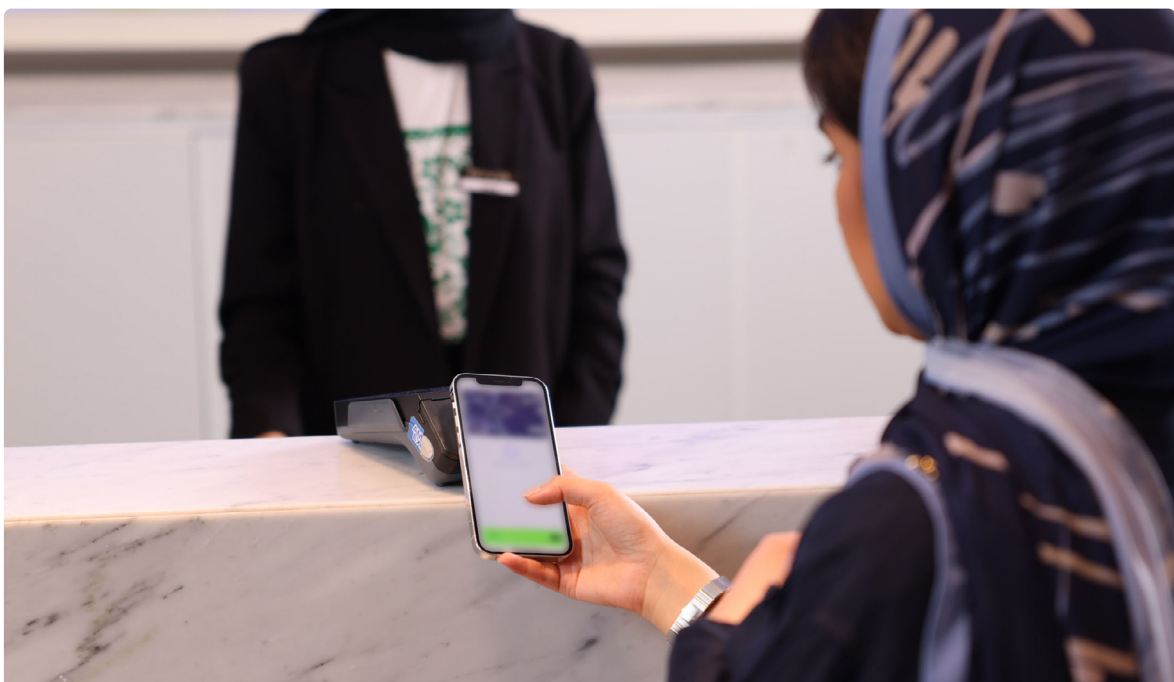
PREPARING A FUTURE-READY RETAIL WORKFORCE

Whilst technological innovation is a constant threat to jobs, it is becoming clear that industries are constantly changing and a shift or evolution in mindset is crucial for professionals to succeed. The traditional focus on tenure and job titles is being replaced by a skill-centric approach. Individuals must adapt to the changing job landscape and constantly develop or refine their skill set and adopt a continuous learning approach to apply new learnings to grow personally and professionally.

Recognizing this need, Tamkeen, in collaboration with the Sector Working Group, has developed National Occupational Standards and Career Pathway Maps specifically for the retail sector. These resources can be used to identify the skills required by the sector and illustrate career trajectories available within the industry, both vertically and laterally. They provide a clear framework for the skills and competencies required at different stages and roles, giving direction to those who wish to progress or pivot in the sector.

By doing so, this approach supports employees in making well-informed decisions about their career paths and professional development, focusing on the acquisition and perfection of skills which are most sought after and needed in the retail sector.

Skills can be categorized as either core or technical skills, both of which are critical to building a successful and competent workforce. Core skills—also known as generic or soft skills — are essential for performing well in any environment or organization and are becoming increasingly more important to employers. These core skills have been captured in a well-defined core skills framework which can be used across all industries. On the other hand, technical skills are the abilities, knowledge, or expertise required to perform specific, job-related tasks. Many of these skills can be acquired through vocational training, learning programs or on-the-job experience.





Bahrain's Core Skills Framework

Tamkeen has developed and pioneered a Core Skills Framework as part of the country's wider skills Framework. The framework has been developed and aligned against a comprehensive list of international benchmarks and best practices, whilst reflecting the specific needs and aspirations of Bahrain as a progressive country.

Core skills underpin, promote and provide the foundation of the skills required to carry out specific job roles and functions. They are usually gained through life and work experience or through structured learning and training programs. Core skills are essential for any job or profession and provide a strong basis for lifelong learning and for building the technical skills required to support specific job roles.

The core skills framework is structured around three key pillars: Social Intelligence, Self-Management, and Analytical Skills, each playing a vital role in shaping a proficient and adaptive workforce. Under each of the key pillars, four core skills are defined forming a complete framework of twelve core skills.

Core Skills Framework



SOCIAL INTELLIGENCE

The ability to be self-aware, inclusive, communicative and form relationships with others with empathy, compassion and assertiveness

Building Inclusivity

The ability to create an environment and manage relationships across diverse groups in a range of different contexts by seeking to establish common ground regardless of race, ethnicity, religion, gender, age, ability, education, or socio-economic status.

Communication

The ability to listen effectively and understand, articulate thoughts and ideas effectively, exchange information, employ negotiation skills and use oral, written and non-verbal skills across a range of different environments.

Empathy

The ability to demonstrate emotional intelligence by demonstrating awareness of the feelings and emotions of others and being able to act accordingly within that context.

Collaboration and Teamwork

The ability to work collectively and effectively with one or more people in order to achieve a common goal, bringing together a range of experience and skills based on exchanging ideas, sharing experience and developing creative solutions.



SELF MANAGEMENT

The ability to manage behaviors, thoughts and emotions in a conscious and productive way

Adaptability

The ability to easily adapt to new situations and changing circumstances in life and work and change actions as required.

Initiative

The ability to think independently, identify opportunities, think innovatively and take action when necessary and without direction.

Planning and Organizing

The ability to plan and organize tasks in order to fulfill requirements within a given time.

Literacy

The ability to understand and have the confidence and skills to work with language to identify, interpret, create and communicate effectively in written and oral formats.



ANALYTICAL SKILLS

The ability to collect, organize, visualize and assimilate data using a range of tools and skills

Digital Literacy

The ability to find, evaluate, analyze, use, share and create content using digital devices, use software applications and troubleshoot common problems.

Critical Thinking

The ability to analyze, interpret, evaluate, infer, explain, synthesize and self-reflect in the context of making reasoned judgements based on a logical sequence of independent thought.

Problem Solving

The ability to identify and assess issues and problems and make use of available resources to evaluate and generate potential solutions in personal, social and work contexts.

Numeracy

The ability to understand and have the confidence and skills to work with numbers using numerical skills to process, interpret and communicate information to help understand, predict and solve problems.

Core Skills to Enable Your Success in the Sector

Core skills provide a foundation for continuous learning and development and play a crucial role in achieving success in a dynamic workplace. As professionals progress in their careers, there is greater emphasis on an advanced level of core skills

that make up the key characteristics of a successful leader. The Sector Working Group have highlighted six overarching core skills that are required across most job roles in the sector:

Figure 4: Core skills in-demand identified by the Sector Working Group

<p>Adaptability</p>	<p>The retail sector is constantly changing and evolving, requiring an adaptable workforce to navigate this environment and quickly pivot to remain competitive. For example, sales associates now need the ability to quickly navigate emerging technologies or sales strategies. Professionals who demonstrate adaptability can be a critical success factor for growth and in some cases as we have seen during the pandemic, survival.</p>
<p>Communication</p>	<p>Retailers value employees that excel in communicating effectively through various channels, such as online and in-store. Employees in retail must possess expertise in conveying information clearly such as explaining the exchange and return policy to deliver excellence in customer service.</p>
<p>Empathy</p>	<p>Building genuine connections with customers, understanding their needs, motivations, and demonstrating emotional intelligence are crucial for building trust, resolving conflict, and fostering positive relationships. Professionals with the ability to develop a strong connection with customers is a key differentiator for employers.</p>
<p>Planning and Organizing</p>	<p>The industry requires strong planning and organizing skills in both the front-end and back-end of operations. From managing the supply chain to organizing marketing campaigns and promotions, this skill is highly relevant in a competitive retail market. Meticulous planning and organization ensure smooth retail operations and can have a direct impact on company profitability.</p>
<p>Problem Solving</p>	<p>The sector offers professionals the opportunity to exercise their problem solving skills on a daily basis, dealing with operational mishaps, customer complaints and the occasional supply chain crisis. A professional with strong problem solving capabilities is able to debottleneck problems and resolve issues with minimal impact on the operations of the business.</p>
<p>Digital Literacy</p>	<p>Retail employees operate digital platforms and troubleshoot software issues on the spot. Assisting customers at self-checkout points or checking inventory availability through a tablet demands a level of digital proficiency. With digitization and automation impacting the sector, professionals possessing this skill are highly sought after by employers in the industry.</p>

Adaptability – Disruption is the “new norm” in Retail.

Recent years have demonstrated the importance of adaptability in the sector. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the retail sector was hit extremely hard, particularly when nationwide lockdowns were enforced, almost completely paralyzing all retail operations. Adaptability and the ability to react rapidly and pivot operations were a necessity for survival for most retailers. Digital operations were set up in record time and outlets adapted to offer new ways of accepting orders whilst complying with COVID regulations.

The supply chain disruptions by the pandemic as well as the disruptions caused by recent geopolitical instability is an example that the need to adapt is becoming the new norm in retail. Companies are now expecting disruptions and are looking for a flexible team that is able to adapt to these disruptions to stay ahead of the competition.

Critical Technical Skills for an Agile Workforce

While the retail sector is primarily focused on the development of core skills, technical expertise is still required in certain areas within the retail sector. The front-of-house operations is heavily focused on core skills but the Sector Working Group has highlighted that the industry workforce lacks deep technical expertise and knowledge to be able to differentiate brand offerings. Professionals usually gain this skill by demonstrating passion for the job and spending time learning about the products they are selling and the market they operate in. The industry is also looking for in-store employees with inventory management skills and knowledge to ensure stock levels are within the limits set by management.

In back-end operations, the Sector Working Group highlighted a shortage of employees with business acumen, data analytics and project management skills. With the advancement of technology, data analytics in particular is becoming a skill increasingly in-demand by employers. Many of these skills are not specific to the retail sector and highly transferable across industries, opening doors for employees in retail to explore alternative career paths in the future.

Figure 5: Technical skills in-demand identified by the Sector Working Group**Commercial Awareness & Business Acumen**

Comprehending current market trends, analyzing competitor strategies, and understanding the financial implications of decisions is crucial. It positions professionals for strategic thinking and potential career growth.

**Data Analysis**

The ability to interpret and utilize data insights is crucial in forming sound decisions that range from optimizing inventory to targeted marketing campaigns that contribute to the overall business performance.

**Inventory Management**

The skill of managing merchandise efficiently, optimizing stock levels and minimizing waste. It involves the skill of anticipating product demand and ensuring availability without holding an excessive amount of inventory.

**Product Knowledge**

Deep understanding of products, their features, and the marketplace. Mastering this skill builds a loyal customer base that increases sales and inevitably increases the value of the employee to the company.

**Project Management Expertise**

Leading and executing projects successfully is fundamental. It ensures timely completion of plans and achievement of strategic goals and operational objectives.

Training Programs and Initiatives

A successful career in retail requires an individual to have the right mindset and training within specific areas in order to perform the required job. Training for a retail job in Bahrain can be acquired through different channels, depending on the skills a candidate is trying to acquire.

According to the Sector Working Group, most retailers provide in-house training to their employees that is tailored to specific roles, particularly when it comes to the front of house employees. In today's competitive environment, a retailer's brand is what drives sales and employees are required to 'live and breathe' the brand. For this reason, companies see more value in controlling the content and delivery of training that exhibits the brand that will ultimately dictate in-store sales and leave a lasting impression on customers.

With that said, there are training opportunities for candidates who are looking to develop their technical skill toolbox that can be applied in the industry. These relevant skills such as Sales or Social Media Management etc. can be acquired through various certified vocational training programs offered by training providers in Bahrain.

University degrees can also be pursued for individuals looking to gain qualifications in specific fields, often related to back of house operations. Bachelor's degrees in fields such as Digital Marketing or Supply Chain Management can be acquired through academic institutions that provide the theoretical knowledge and skills to build a solid foundation or to build on existing vocational experience for a career in back of the house retail.

Tamkeen is dedicated to supporting the enhancement of skills and competencies of both individuals and businesses, by addressing the changing demands of the retail sector. Tamkeen offers a range of programs

that help bridge skill gaps and foster a culture of continuous learning and adaptation. It also offers businesses support to promote the upskilling and employment of Bahrainis in the retail sector. It offers this support through a range of programs that contribute to individual career growth and supports the overall competitiveness and sustainability of the Bahraini economy.

Industry and vocational convergence

Recently, companies are venturing out into vocational training to strengthen the pipeline of candidates looking to enter the retail sector. For example, Chalhoub Group, a leader in Middle Eastern retail luxury, launched an internationally accredited retail academy in 2007 with a vision of "Inspiring Excellence in Retail".

The academy aims to upskill retail frontline communities on all aspects of fashion, beauty and gifting to deliver outstanding customer experience and empower candidates with the right skills for a career in retail.

Similarly, Alshaya group has also launched a retail academy in the Princess Nora Bint AbdulRahman University with the goal of enhancing the skills of women and improving their career prospects in the retail sector.

The academy provides Saudi women with specialized training on retail skills and offers them guaranteed jobs when they graduate. The academy offers training programs for holders of high school certificates as well as university graduates.



Tamkeen: Employment Support Programs

National Employment Program

The program encourages private sector enterprises to employ nationals through wage support for up to three years. This helps Bahraini graduates and jobseekers to enter the labor market, while also supporting enterprises to employ the talent they need to drive their productivity and success.

Jobseeker Training Program

The program provides training and upskilling opportunities for jobseekers nominated by the Ministry of Labour to increase their competitiveness and facilitate their entry to the labor market.

Train and Place Program

The program offers training support for jobseekers to gain essential skills and requirements for the labor market through creating sustainable employment opportunities and matching the requirements of the private sector with available talent.

On-the-Job Training Program

The program provides opportunities for jobseekers to gain practical work experiences that can equip them with the required skills to enter the labor market.

Apprenticeship Program

The program, in collaboration with academic and vocational training institutes, provides enterprises with the opportunity to employ Bahrainis as apprentices, giving them the chance to obtain in-demand vocational skills across different trades as well as specialize in the fields of information technology, cybersecurity, and other future jobs.



Tamkeen: Career Development Support Programs

Wage Increment Support

The program allows enterprises to obtain wage increment support for existing employees, facilitating the career progression of Bahrainis in the private sector and encouraging employers to retain and reward their workforce. As part of Tamkeen's commitment to supporting this progression, enterprises are encouraged to hire new talent at higher wages by fully covering the difference between the new and previous wages.

Leadership Employment Program

The program aims to empower Bahrainis to advance in their careers by providing wage support/increment for enterprises looking to employ Bahrainis in mid and executive jobs in the private sector. This enables enterprises to employ and promote talented individuals to assume leadership roles, thus helping Bahrainis progress in their careers.

Enterprise Training Support Program

The program offers enterprises support with their training costs to upskill and develop their human capital with the aim of improving their competencies and capabilities to become more productive, and help enterprises grow, remain competitive, and retain talented employees.

Professional Certification Program

The program offers individuals an opportunity to enhance their skills and build their competencies through attaining internationally accredited professional certificates related to their area of expertise.

Global Ready Talent Program

The program supports overseas placement and work opportunities for Bahrainis to help them gain valuable work experience, develop their skills and gain exposure to international work environments.

Key Takeaways

▶ Bahrain's retail sector offers ample opportunities for career development and growth

Individuals who are looking for a career can lead a professional journey in the retail sector, beginning from an entry-level position and progressing into supervisory and higher-level managerial roles. Customer interaction experience is invaluable and builds a solid foundation for a career in management. Employers need to increase the awareness of attractive career paths to prospective employees to shift the mindset and encourage more interest towards the sector.

▶ Retail operations, supply chain and e-commerce roles are in demand, with a preference for local talent

The sector is looking to hire more Bahrainis in front-of-house (retail operations) and back-of-house (supply chain/ merchandising, e-commerce) roles. Roles in retail operations involve more customer interaction and require driven candidates with a strong set of core skills whereas the back-of-house functions require additional technical skills to effectively manage the "retail engine".

▶ Adaptability is a core skill in high demand by retailers

The general pace of progress in the retail sector coupled with the recent market disruptions to retail operations (pandemic, supply chain, geopolitics etc.) requires employees to be able to make decisions quickly and adapt to the market circumstances to grow and in some cases, survive. Employees who can demonstrate this skill are highly valuable members of the workforce, positioning them as prime candidates for potential promotions to leadership positions.

▶ Retail employees must adopt a continuous learning approach to progress in their career

The retail market is constantly changing. Consumer behavior, technological advancement and shifting market dynamics are constantly transforming the industry and forcing iterations. To stay relevant and succeed, employers require a team of employees that embrace these changes and adapt their mindset and skill set to steer the organization in the right direction. Retail professionals should proactively look for professional development opportunities to stay ahead and capitalize on emerging opportunities within the sector. This includes fostering a culture of continuous learning that focuses on understanding product knowledge, staying updated on sector trends and developing soft skills that are essential for the retail sector.

▶ Instore retailers must shift focus towards delivering an exceptional customer experience

Front-of-house transactional work is being replaced by technology with the incoming self-service checkouts, availability of product information online and rise in chatbots. Employers are now focused on using physical stores to provide customers with an experience to boost sales through their omni-channel platform. Employees need to set their mindset towards delivering an exceptional customer experience that reflects the values of the brand and builds customer loyalty. This customer-centric approach requires a deep understanding of consumer behavior, market trends, and effective communication skills.

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Glossary of Terms

Term	Definition
Core skills	The combination of essential skills required to be fully prepared for life and work in a global economy
Digitalization	The use of digital technologies, digitized information and data to change business operations and introduce efficiencies and opportunities
Emerging Jobs	A job/occupation that currently has small numbers but is expected to grow in the future
Job	A paid position of employment held by an individual
Job Family	A group of jobs/positions that involve work in the same functional occupation and share related core knowledge and background requirements. The job family structure is based on function rather than organizational structure.
Job Role	A specific set of responsibilities and duties assigned to an employee within an organization
National Occupational Standards (NOS)	A set of skills, knowledge and performance criteria required for key job roles in the sector. NOS provide a standardized framework for defining skills and competencies, ensuring that all individuals in the same sector or profession meet a certain minimum standard set by the sector
Sector skills report	A concise report which outlines an overview of an industry sector by identifying trends, presenting macro-economic data, outlining current and future job roles and associated skills gaps and making recommendations for the future
Skills framework	Provides information such as key sector information, occupations and job roles, and the required existing and emerging skills to fulfil roles within that sector
Skills gap	The difference between the identified skills (core and technical) that an employer expects their employees to have and the actual skills that employees possess
Skills mismatch	An overarching term which can be used to describe various instances of imbalance in skills e.g. skill shortage which is where the demand for a particular type of skills exceeds the supply of the workforce with these skills; skill surplus which is where the supply of the workforce with a particular type of skills exceeds demand in the job market; over-skilling occurs where the workforce has more skills than required to perform a job adequately; under-skilling occurs where the workforce has less skills than required to perform a job adequately
Stakeholder engagement	The process by which an organization involves others who may be affected by the decisions it makes or can influence the impact and implementation of its decisions
Technical skills	The specialized knowledge and expertise required to perform specific tasks and use specific tools and programs associated with a particular job role