

# Apprenticeships and investment in training

Explore the CIPD's point of view on apprenticeships and investment in training, including recommendations for both Government and employers

Apprenticeships are an asset to any organisation, yet their potential in England remains unfulfilled. As such, we're calling for the apprenticeship levy to include accredited training aligned to industrial strategy priorities, while supporting government reforms towards an employer-led system with standards demonstrating occupational competency.

England has suffered a long-term and substantial decline in employer investment in training over past decades. The government's introduction of the apprenticeship levy in 2017 aimed to address this by spurring the increase of both the *quantity* and *quality* of apprenticeships, as well as employer spending on training.

However, apprenticeships in England are still not delivering in terms of the quality of skills and experience they provide. Four in ten apprenticeships are created only at intermediate level, which places England behind the best systems in Europe, where nearly all apprenticeships are at advanced or higher levels.

Apart from being concentrated at lower levels, the current system is not sufficiently providing an accessible pathway to work for young people, with most apprenticeship places going to existing employees and older apprentices. This is compounded by a bureaucratic and inflexible levy which is not tailored to employers' skills requirements.

Furthermore, the proliferation of apprenticeship standards has raised concerns over the number of narrow and/or overlapping standards which lack occupational breadth and restrict the extent to which apprentices gain transferable skills.

Apprenticeships are an asset to any organisation and bring significant benefits to businesses, individuals and the wider economy. At their best they provide a structured route into the labour market for young people, enabling them to progress in their careers and, at the same time, providing employers with a motivated and engaged workforce with the technical skills they need.

However, the quality and accessibility of some apprenticeships in England raise concerns. Currently, two-thirds of apprenticeships are going to existing employees and individuals aged over 19, meaning the role apprenticeships should have as a route into employment

for young people is not being fulfilled. Additionally, half of all apprenticeship starts in 2018 were only at Level 2 (GCSE level), leaving England considerably behind the best systems in Europe, where nearly all apprenticeships are at advanced or higher level (equivalent to Level 3, A-Level, and above).

These challenges are compounded by an inflexible apprenticeship levy which forces employers to consider apprenticeships as a way of delivering all forms of workplace training. While apprenticeships are an important and valuable form of training for many people and businesses, they are also rigid and expensive programmes that don't always meet employers' skills or workforce development demand. As such, the CIPD is calling for a broadening of the levy into a wider training levy, to include other forms of accredited training that are aligned to industrial strategy priorities.

The CIPD supports recent government reforms towards a more employer-led system with standards demonstrating occupational competency. However, we view with caution the rapid rise in the number of new apprenticeship standards and the implications about their quality.

Currently, there are 500 new apprenticeship standards approved for delivery and many more under development. This compares to just 200 apprenticeship occupations in Austria, 320 in Germany, 230 in Switzerland and just 100 in Denmark. The National Audit Office reported that by 2020 there may be as many as 1,600 standards in place, compared with 240 apprenticeship frameworks.

This rapid proliferation raises concerns over narrow and/or overlapping standards which lack occupational breadth and restrict the extent to which apprentices gain transferable skills.

- The government's Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education (IfATE) should review all Level 2 standards, and ensure there is a clear and justifiable rationale for their introduction relative to a Level 3 qualification.
- The IfATE should remove any narrow and overlapping standards, ensuring that core and transferable skills are embedded in a consistent way and described using an agreed common language.
- Government should reinstate the requirement for apprenticeship standards to include a qualification, membership of professional body, or a licence to practise.
- Government should develop an apprenticeship access fund along the lines of the Higher Education Access Fund to target and support disadvantaged young people.
- To ensure that the apprenticeship levy leads to an overall increase in employer

training effort, the levy should be adapted into a more flexible training levy.

- Apprenticeships should be integrated into workforce planning and aligned with business need and growth strategies. Apprenticeships should be targeted at areas where there are clearly identified skills gaps and shortages or future areas of growth.
  - Apprenticeships should offer a training route to a skilled role. Employers should invest in high-quality apprenticeships which provide the most value to both the individual and the employer. The minimum for an apprenticeship is 12 months; however, most high-quality apprenticeships take longer to complete, sometimes up to four years.
  - Recruitment strategies should aim to maximise equality and diversity in apprenticeship programmes.
  - Employers should do due diligence when choosing a provider. Getting a quality training provider is critical in ensuring off-the-job training elements match an organisation's needs while being both job-specific and transferable.
  - Employers should provide practical support and guidance, including regular meetings with line managers and additional mentors, to support apprentices and apprenticeships.
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## Reports

- [Making apprenticeships future-fit](#)
- [Assessing the early impact of the apprenticeship levy: employers' perspective](#)
- [Employer's views of the apprenticeship levy](#)
- [Where next for apprenticeships?](#)

## Guidance and factsheets

- [Apprenticeships](#)