

Association for Project Management Response

APPG for Apprenticeships Call for Evidence: Apprenticeships & the Industrial Strategy

1. To what extent do you welcome the skills reforms initiated by this Government? Please rate on a scale of 1–10, where 1 = do not welcome at all, and 10 = fully welcome the reforms.
response: 6/10.

2. Set out your initial view on the performance of Skills England and its policy development process.

We welcome the ambition to create a more responsive, employer-led skills system, particularly where reforms support higher technical and professional training, clearer progression pathways and entry routes for young people. However, our support is conditional because the success of the reforms will depend heavily on the quality of Skills England's policy development process. Skills England has an important convening role, but its approach needs greater transparency, stability and sector-specific engagement. Sectors across UK industry are complex, with a huge array of occupations. This makes it difficult for policy decisions to reflect the full range of technical and professional apprenticeships that support delivery as no one size fits all approach is likely to work. The response from Skills England with regards to concerns raised particularly in construction has been helpful and listened to industry views, however some of this could have been avoided if the engagement had happened prior to the policy announcements being made. It should also publish clearer evidence, timelines and decision-making criteria, particularly where changes may affect apprenticeship funding, assessment models or routes to professional recognition. Any reform should simplify the system where possible, but not weaken occupational competence, reduce confidence among employers and apprentices, or disconnect apprenticeships from professional standards. For these reasons, we cautiously welcome the direction of travel.

3. How important are apprenticeships to delivery and innovation within the Government's Industrial Strategy? Please rate on a scale of 1–10, where 1 = Not important at all, and 10 = Extremely important.
response: 8/10.

4. How closely do the current Apprenticeship Standards reflect the specific technical requirements of the eight priority sectors identified in the Industrial Strategy? How responsive is Skills England to skills needs in these sectors?

Current apprenticeship standards may reflect technical requirements. However, the system is weaker at recognising cross-sector professional capabilities, particularly project management. Project management generally sits within the Business and Administration route, despite being essential to delivery across all Industrial Strategy sectors. Because occupational maps do not clearly show its connection to construction, infrastructure, clean energy, defence, digital and other sector routes, it is often missed when sectors identify skills needs. This is further confused by separate Digital Project Manager and Construction Project Manager standards. These standards provide valuable sector-specific routes, but Skills England should also ensure that the common professional project management capabilities underpinning them are visible across occupational maps. The issue is reinforced by labour market classifications: digital and construction project manager roles have SOC codes, while general project management is less clearly captured, underestimating demand. APM/PwC's Golden Thread 2024 research shows the scale of the profession: 2.32 million FTEs, 8.5% of UK FTEs, and £186.8bn GVA, 9.2% of UK GVA. Coverage of project management apprenticeships is good, with routes that allow progression to professional membership and Chartered Project Professional. Skills England should recognise project management as a strategic cross-sector capability and make its relevance clearer within occupational maps.

5. How can the Local Skills Improvement Plans (LSIPs) be better integrated with national Industrial Strategy goals to prevent regional skills disparities?

LSIPs should be integrated with national Industrial Strategy goals through a clearer national framework, shared labour market intelligence and stronger feedback loops between local employers, sector bodies, professional bodies, national providers and policymakers. The new Government's approach to devolution needs, and should, take this into account. Local plans are valuable, particularly in identifying local benefits, but they can reinforce disparities if developed in isolation or if cross-sector capabilities are missed. There is also a risk that national employers and professional bodies may have to negotiate separately with multiple local providers, increasing duplication, cost and inconsistency, and weakening consistent quality, assessment and progression routes.

This is particularly important for project management. APM's *But what about the locals?* briefing highlights weak understanding of project management in local government: nearly a third of council staff did not understand what project management is, and project professionals reported misconceptions that project management is administrative rather than a professional discipline. This lack of understanding can undermine recognition of the need for competent professionals to scope, commission, govern and deliver complex work. It can also mean LSIPs identify sector delivery needs without recognising the project capability needed to make delivery viable. Government should set clearer expectations for how LSIPs identify skills needs, map them to apprenticeship standards, professional qualifications and competence frameworks, and escalate gaps requiring national action. A stronger national-local mechanism would ensure provision is shaped by local insight while remaining aligned with national priorities, provider capacity and professional competence requirements.

Funding and Levy reform

6. To what extent will levy reform alleviate friction in the apprenticeships system? Please rate on a scale of 1–10, where 1 = will not alleviate friction at all, and 10 = will greatly alleviate friction.

response: 4/10.

7. What is your view of the Growth and Skills Levy and, if it should be improved, how?

The Growth and Skills Levy could be valuable if it increases flexibility while protecting high-quality professional pathways. Employers value apprenticeships most where they lead to recognised competence, professional qualifications and progression routes, not simply shorter training. In project management, this means supporting full apprenticeship routes, APM qualifications such as PFQ and PMQ, professional membership and progression towards Chartered Project Professional.

APM qualifications research found that 80% of APM qualification holders said qualifications gave them more confidence to deliver projects and 73% said they helped them deliver projects more successfully. Employers are also facing growing skills pressure: APM's Business Leader Index briefing found that only 38% of business leaders said it was easy to recruit project professionals with the right skills, down from 62%, and only 64% believed they had enough project professionals for effective delivery over the next five years. The levy should therefore prioritise competence-based apprenticeships and funded professional qualifications where they meet employer need. It should protect longer and higher-level routes and allow ringfenced support for project management training that improves delivery capability.

8. Which sectors stand to benefit most from apprenticeship units?

Apprenticeship units are likely to benefit sectors and skill areas with discrete, fast-changing or emerging skills needs, particularly where workers already have a strong occupational base and need targeted upskilling. This could include digital technologies, artificial intelligence, data, cyber security, clean energy, advanced manufacturing, life sciences, defence, financial services, professional and business services, and areas affected by regulatory or technological change. Units may be useful where employers need rapid development in specific capabilities such as digital transformation, sustainability, risk management, project controls, governance, stakeholder engagement, commercial management, data literacy or leadership. For the project profession, units could support people already managing projects or work packages who need focused development in particular areas,

while linking back to recognised professional standards and qualifications. However, apprenticeship units should be complementary provision rather than substitutes for full apprenticeships or wider competence development and assessment. Multiple modular units do not automatically add up to full occupational competence. In areas such as project management, it is often the interdependencies between risk, scope, cost, schedule, governance, people, benefits and change that determine whether delivery succeeds. If those interdependencies are missed, delivery is likely to be fragmented or unsuccessful. Units are therefore less suitable where the purpose is to develop competence over time in professional, regulated, safety-critical or complex delivery roles. The greatest benefit will come where units are clearly mapped to professional qualifications and progression routes, helping people build towards recognised competence rather than fragmented training.

9. Will the current 12-month expiry window for levy funds facilitate or hinder workforce planning across IS-8 sectors? Please rate on a scale of 1–10, where 1 = significantly hinders workforce planning, and 10 = strongly facilitates workforce planning.

response: 2/10.

10. How can the relationship between HM Treasury and the Department for Work and Pensions/Department for Education be improved to deliver a sustainable budget for skills in England?

HM Treasury and DWP/DfE should agree a longer-term, transparent funding settlement for skills that distinguishes between short-term labour market interventions and strategic investment in occupational competence. Skills funding should not be treated solely as a mechanism for immediate job creation; it must also support productivity, safety, professional standards and long-term national capability. Joint planning should include clear modelling of the impact of levy changes, defunding decisions and assessment reform on employers, providers, professional bodies and apprentices, particularly in sectors with long training pipelines.

11. How can the Government's funding mechanism for the skills budget be better devised and communicated to employers and training providers?

Employers and providers need early notice of funding rules, eligibility criteria, levy expiry arrangements and any proposed defunding. Communication should explain the rationale for decisions, the evidence used to define public value, and the implications for apprentices already on programme. For technical and professional apprenticeships, Government should also communicate how funding policy interacts with professional qualification, and regulatory competence requirements. For the project profession, communication should also make clear how the Growth and Skills Levy can support competence-based education and training, professional qualifications and upskilling pathways. This would help employers and training providers plan provision with confidence and avoid fragmented, inconsistent learning experiences.

Delivery

12. To what extent do you see apprenticeship units as meeting the upskilling needs of innovative sectors compared to full apprenticeship programmes?

Apprenticeship units can meet some upskilling needs, especially where the requirement is narrow, emerging or technical and where the learner is already occupationally competent. They are not a substitute for full apprenticeship programmes where the aim is to develop, evidence and independently assess occupational competence across knowledge, skills and behaviours. In innovative sectors, units should be used as complementary provision, helping workers keep pace with new technologies and regulatory changes while full apprenticeships remain the primary route for new entrants and those progressing into technical and professional roles. In project management, units could provide useful targeted learning for people who already manage work packages or projects but lack formal development in specific areas. However, shortening learning experiences or reducing qualification requirements could hinder apprentices from gaining the experience needed for career progression. Units should therefore be connected to recognised professional pathways, project management apprenticeships and progression towards Chartered Project Professional, rather than becoming isolated fragments of training. Professional qualifications also increase employability and add value to organisations by creating consistent terminology, shared understanding and good practice in project delivery.

13. Please set out your view on the Government's reform of End-Point Assessment.

The intention to simplify End-Point Assessment is understandable, particularly where current plans are complex, burdensome or duplicative. However, reform must be evolutionary rather than revolutionary. For professional apprenticeships, assessment is valuable because it provides independent assurance of occupational competence. This is important for project management, where competence cannot be demonstrated through knowledge alone. Effective project professionals must be able to apply judgement, manage risk, lead teams, govern change, communicate with stakeholders and make decisions in complex delivery environments. Assessment should therefore test applied competence across the project lifecycle, including the ability to shape viable projects at inception, align projects with strategic objectives, and support delivery through uncertainty. Risks arise if mandatory qualifications replace competence assessment, if sampling is used inappropriately, if behaviours are reduced to employer sign-off, or if assessment is carried out by people without the necessary professional competence. Reform should retain synoptic assessment, independent professional input where needed, and clear alignment with professional body expectations.

14. How can SMEs be incentivised to take on apprentices?

SMEs should be supported through stable funding, simpler administration, clearer guidance and practical wraparound support. Many micro and small businesses struggle to navigate changing apprenticeship rules, assessment requirements and employer responsibilities. Incentives should include targeted wage or training support, help with mentoring and supervision, access to shared apprenticeship models where appropriate, and clear guidance on progression to professional qualification. For project management specifically, SMEs would benefit from accessible routes that help employees move from informal or accidental project roles into structured competence development. This could include funded project management qualifications, short applied bootcamps, mentoring, and clearer links between apprenticeship routes and professional standards. It should also address barriers identified in the project profession, including inconsistent mentoring quality, variable learning experiences and low apprentice wages that can make opportunities inaccessible to some learners. Government should avoid policy changes that increase uncertainty or administrative burden, because SMEs have less capacity to absorb repeated reform.

15. How can schools' careers advice be improved to promote the apprenticeships pathway?

Schools' careers advice should present apprenticeships as high-quality routes into professional careers, not only as alternatives to academic study. Pupils, parents and teachers need clearer information about progression from levels 2 to 7, routes to chartership and professional registration, and the ability of apprenticeships to lead to rewarding careers project management across all industry sectors. Project management should be made much more visible as a career in its own right. Many people enter the profession later or accidentally after starting in construction, engineering, architecture, business or public-sector delivery roles, yet project management skills such as planning, organisation, leadership, risk management, communication and problem-solving are highly transferable and relevant to young people. Careers advice should include employer engagement, apprentice ambassadors, professional body input and examples of progression into higher technical, degree-level and chartered pathways.

16. To what extent are local authorities and other devolved government structures responsible for the success of the apprenticeships system? Please rate on a scale of 1–10, where 1 = not at all responsible, and 10 = highly responsible.

response: 6/10.

17. If you had one policy recommendation for government, what would it be?

Government needs to think long term, even when the political situation suggests short term thinking. To that end, it should pause and stabilise apprenticeship assessment and funding reforms for professional apprenticeships, and co-design any changes with employers, professional bodies, providers, assessment organisations and sector representatives.

The priority should be to protect full occupational competence, recognised professional pathways and employer confidence across all sectors, rather than creating a fragmented system of short courses that may not lead to recognised capability. This is especially important for cross-sector professions such as project management, which underpin delivery in every Industrial Strategy sector but can be missed when skills planning is organised too narrowly by sector or local area.

Government should use existing professional infrastructure, including competence frameworks, professional qualifications, apprenticeship routes, professional membership and chartered standards, rather than creating disconnected new requirements.

The single test for reform should be whether it improves apprenticeship outcomes without reducing rigour, weakening professional recognition, undermining national provider capacity, or creating additional barriers for learners and employers seeking recognised competence.