

Construction apprenticeships

Opportunities. Challenges. Support.



Autumn
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Reporting periods

Throughout this report, comparisons between England, Scotland, and Wales are based primarily on the 2024/25 reporting year, as this is the latest period for which comparable apprenticeship data are available across all three nations. Scotland publishes apprenticeship statistics on a financial year basis and has already released 2025/26 data. These more recent Scottish statistics, together with subsequent policy developments, are referenced where they provide additional context, but direct comparisons throughout the report use the common 2024/25 baseline.

Foreword

Apprenticeships: The gold standard for construction skills



Construction has always relied on apprenticeships to develop the skilled workforce it needs. They remain the industry’s gold standard, combining practical experience with formal learning in a way that benefits both employers and apprentices. Yet this report shows that the challenge facing construction is no longer simply about encouraging more young people to choose the industry.

The evidence suggests something more fundamental. Demand for skilled construction workers remains high and is expected to grow as the industry delivers new homes, critical infrastructure and the transition to net zero. At the same time, youth unemployment remains elevated and many young people are looking for high-quality career opportunities. The gap lies between those two realities. Too few employers, particularly small and micro businesses, are able or willing to create apprenticeship opportunities, while too many apprentices who do start fail to complete their training.

That matters because construction is unlike many other sectors. Skills cannot be created overnight. Today’s apprentice is tomorrow’s skilled tradesperson, supervisor, site manager or business owner. If we do not invest in developing that workforce now, the consequences will be felt for years to come, not only by construction businesses, but across the wider economy that depends upon them.

This report demonstrates that increasing apprenticeship numbers is not simply a question of providing more funding. Employers consistently identify practical barriers including time, administrative complexity, finding suitable candidates and navigating the apprenticeship system. These challenges are particularly acute for SMEs,

which make up the overwhelming majority of construction businesses and have the greatest potential to increase apprenticeship opportunities if they can be better supported.

There are reasons to be optimistic. Achievement rates are recovering, more women are entering construction apprenticeships, and new pathways such as Foundation Apprenticeships have the potential to widen participation. But policy reform alone will not be enough. The industry’s success will depend on making apprenticeships easier for employers to offer, supporting more apprentices to complete their training and ensuring businesses of every size have the confidence to invest in the next generation.

At CITB, we are committed to helping employers do exactly that. By reducing barriers, supporting recruitment and championing the value of apprenticeships, we can help ensure that more people enter and successfully complete the training that construction and the wider economy will increasingly depend upon.

CITB is here to support employers to take on an apprentice.

Our New Entrant Support Team (NEST) help employers find, recruit, fund, and retain an apprentice or new entrant as well as support for employers to access our apprenticeship grant.

Apprenticeships are a game-changer for a business, and a life-changer for apprentices. All of us with a stake in the future of the construction industry need to raise awareness of the enormous, enduring value they bring.

Leanne Land,
Head of New Entrant Support, CITB

Executive Summary

This report provides the latest insights into construction apprenticeships across England, Scotland and Wales. It reaffirms the enduring value of apprenticeships: to apprentices, to employers and to the British economy and society as a whole.

We present an updated analysis of apprenticeship starts and completion rates. We look at who is becoming an apprentice, and which employers hire them. We also give an overview of how government policy has changed the landscape for apprentices and employers.

We look at CITB's role and the support we provide to help make apprentices an attractive choice for businesses of all sizes throughout Great Britain.

The challenge

The recruitment challenge for construction has many aspects to it, including:

- The required recruitment numbers are high and rising
- Competition from other sectors is increasing
- Apprenticeship achievement rates are poor in England
- Many SMEs are reluctant to take on apprentices despite their future need for the skilled workers apprenticeships create

More broadly, this report provides a summary of the skills challenges industry faces and the opportunities to be seized.

CITB's latest Construction Workforce Outlook forecast, for 2026–30, estimates that additional output equivalent to 200,800 additional workers will be required to meet construction demand in Great Britain¹ over the next five years.

That's the equivalent of needing to add 40,160 workers per year, to the workforce for the next five years. The persistently high additional requirement is being driven by increasing demand in private housing, infrastructure and net zero retrofitting. Other factors are also in play, such as greater numbers of older workers retiring who need to be replaced with the next generation.

Meanwhile, around 33,000 people started construction apprenticeships in Britain in 2024/25. While this represents an improvement since the pandemic, it remains well short of what the industry needs. Current projections suggest apprenticeship starts would need to at least double to meet recruitment demand, even alongside other entry routes into construction. However, that estimate reflects today's more subdued labour market. If construction demand returns to the stronger medium-term growth previously expected, the industry could once again require something much closer to three times the current number of apprenticeship starts.

Construction apprenticeship starts and achievements – Great Britain

	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25
Apprenticeship Starts	31,224	31,256	30,537	27,508	35,770	33,348	33,045	32,741
Apprenticeship Achievements	17,830	16,755	14,487	12,888	13,551	14,687	19,075	19,069

Note: See Figure 1 in the Appendix for data by GB nation

While apprenticeship starts must continue to increase alongside other routes into construction, apprenticeships remain the industry's principal employer-led route into skilled employment, combining structured training with sustained workplace experience. Improving achievement rates in England may offer the quickest way to increase the number of apprentices entering the workforce. Currently, only 58% of construction apprentices successfully complete their apprenticeship by passing their End-Point Assessment, meaning more than two in five fail to achieve the qualification despite starting training. Increasing the proportion who achieve their qualification and progress into employment would strengthen the industry's skills pipeline by making better use of apprentices who have already entered training, while complementing future growth in apprenticeship starts.

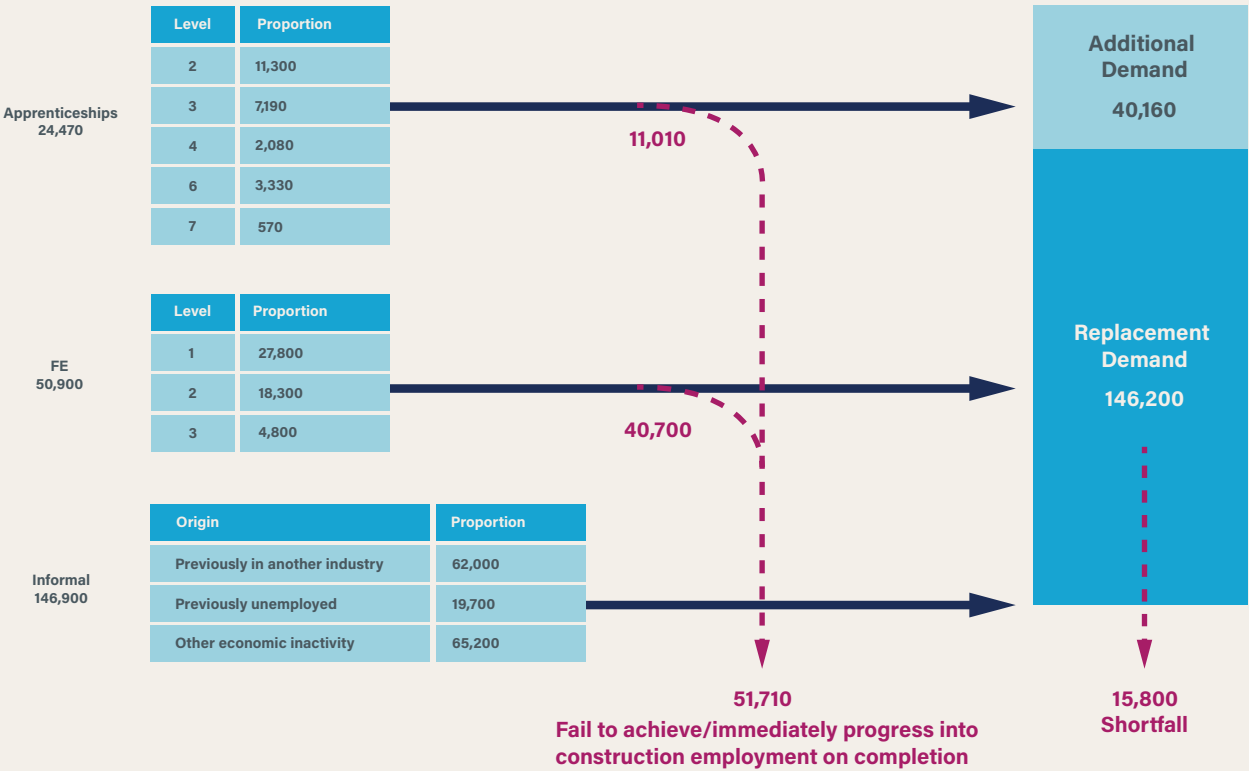
Although some apprentices who do not reach End-Point Assessment will eventually enter the construction workforce, many will not. Others may take considerably longer to do so, increasing the likelihood that skills need to be refreshed before they can contribute fully to the industry.

Increasing apprenticeship starts is therefore only part of the solution. Improving completion rates would help ensure that more apprentices become fully qualified workers, strengthening the industry's skills pipeline. Given construction contributes around 6% of UK economic output and enables investment and growth across almost every other sector of the economy, improving apprenticeship outcomes would benefit not only construction but the wider economy as well.



¹CITB Construction Workforce Outlook - 2026-2030 (2026)

Projected flows into construction, England 2024/25



Data sources and methodology

Apprenticeships: Data on apprenticeship starts is taken from the Department for Education (DfE) for the 2024/25 academic year, covering learners starting programmes in the Construction, Planning and the Built Environment Sector Subject Area.

Further Education (FE): FE enrolment data is also sourced from DfE for 2024/25. Enrolments are adjusted to focus on learners aged under 19, used here as a proxy for new entrants to construction occupations, and factored down to reflect that learners are often enrolled on multiple learning aims.

Progression rates: The proportion of apprenticeship and FE learners who progress into construction employment is based on the CITB report "Destinations of Construction Learners in Further Education" (2017), specifically Appendix B (p.59), which provides six-month destinations by learner group.

Informal entrants: Estimates of informal entrants (those entering construction from other industries, unemployment or inactivity) and their flows into the sector are derived from analysis of the Office for National Statistics (ONS) Labour Force Survey five-quarter longitudinal dataset.

Demand for labour: Replacement demand reflects expected outflows of workers from the sector due to employment churn, retirement, and ill health, while additional demand is taken from CITB's Construction Workforce Outlook, which forecasts workforce needs required to support projected output growth.

Shortfall calculation: The shortfall shown represents the gap between the effective 'supply' of new workers (after adjusting for non-completion and non-progression into construction) and total labour demand (replacement + additional demand).

The projected workforce shortfall is lower than in last year's analysis. However, this should not be interpreted as a fundamental easing of the industry's long-term skills challenge. Rather, it reflects a combination of improved workforce stability, lower projected demand and refinements to the underlying data.

The workforce has proved more stable than previously anticipated, with slightly more people entering construction than leaving, reducing replacement demand. This is likely to reflect a cooler labour market, with fewer opportunities for workers to move between employers and less labour turnover than during the immediate post-pandemic period. At the same time, increased economic uncertainty and weaker growth expectations have moderated projected demand for additional workers over the medium term. The analysis also benefits from improved insight into progression through education and training routes, including a more accurate understanding of the relationship between further education enrolments and individual learners.

The findings also highlight that opportunities exist to strengthen both of the industry's principal training routes. The scale of the further education pipeline means that even modest improvements in progression into construction employment could generate substantial workforce gains. Equally, within the apprenticeship system, improving achievement rates represents one of the clearest opportunities to increase the number of qualified apprentices entering the workforce. This report therefore focuses on how apprenticeship participation, achievement and progression can be strengthened as part of the industry's wider skills pipeline.

Apprenticeships are devolved

Apprenticeships are devolved across England, Scotland, and Wales, with significant differences in policy, funding, qualifications and delivery. This means that while the construction workforce challenge is shared across Great Britain, the apprenticeship systems through which employers recruit and train workers are not identical. The analysis in this report therefore focuses first on the common trends and challenges across Great Britain, before considering where national differences provide important context or point to different policy responses.



Who recruits apprentices?

There are approximately 85,000 construction apprentices enrolled in learning across Britain² However, only around one in six (17%) construction businesses employ an apprentice and just one in 20 (6%) employ more than one³. Large construction employers (those with 250+ employees) are much more likely to recruit an apprentice with 80% employing apprentices.

The construction industry is dominated by micro employers (i.e. those with 0-9 employees), which make up about 95% of businesses in the sector. Of those, 85% say it is unlikely they will recruit an apprentice in the next 12 months⁴. Only 12% of micro businesses employ an apprentice, and yet these firms will be desperate for the capability and capacity that apprentices bring once they achieve their qualification.

The challenge is that small and micro employers are often hard to reach, lack capacity and confidence in their pipeline of work. Crucially, they may not have organisational awareness or capability to hire, manage and carry out the admin for an apprentice.

If we are to increase apprenticeship starts across the industry, we must motivate, incentivise and support smaller companies to take on apprentices.

Small firms are often not well equipped to navigate the online systems required to manage apprenticeships. In addition, they typically employ a single apprentice and do not always recruit again immediately after completion, resulting in interruptions in apprenticeship uptake.

Across the whole of construction, around one in three (35%) businesses offer apprenticeships⁵, with 17% currently employing an apprentice⁶ and 16% expecting to recruit one in the next year. This represents a modest decline compared with last year, when 38% offered apprenticeships, 20% employed an apprentice and 17% expected to recruit. Intention to recruit an apprentice decreases with company size, with only one in ten (10%) businesses employing 2-4 people expecting to recruit an apprentice in the next 12 months⁷.

Over eight in ten (81%) employers said they were not at all likely to take on an apprentice⁸, highlighting the scale of the challenge in encouraging more businesses to see apprenticeships as a viable route to meeting their workforce needs.

²Department for Education (England), Apprenticeships <https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/apprenticeships>, Skills Development Scotland, Modern Apprenticeship Statistics <https://www.skillsdevelopmentscotland.co.uk/publications-statistics/statistics/modern-apprenticeships?page=1&statisticCategoryId=4&order=date-desc>, and Welsh Government, StatsWales - Work-based learning <https://statswales.gov.wales/Catalogue/Education-and-Skills/Post-16-Education-and-Training/Further-Education-and-Work-Based-Learning/Learners/Work-Based-Learning>.

³CITB Employer Panel Employer: Attitudes and Motivations regarding Learning and Training (September 2025)

^{4,5,6,7,8}ibid

Factors affecting apprenticeship recruitment

The Apprenticeship Levy was introduced in 2017. It was a major change in skills policy in England, putting employers in the driving seat of the apprenticeships system. Employers pay into the system and apprenticeship funding is accessed by them, rather than training providers. One effect of this is that the number of apprenticeship starts is open to market forces and increased volatility.

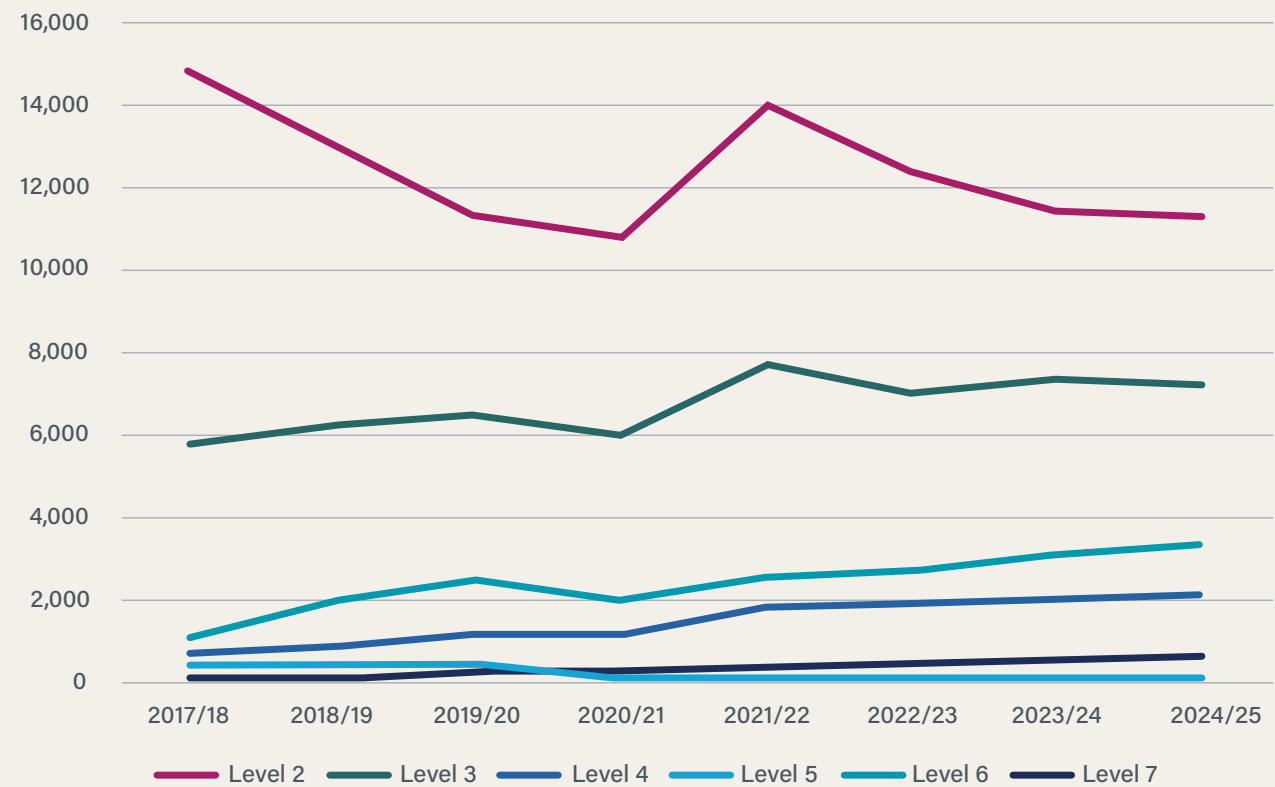
While the Apprenticeship Levy has undoubtedly encouraged higher level apprenticeships among older workers and the existing workforce, participation in entry level apprenticeships is falling, particularly among young entrants (under 19), which is significant when trying to attract new people into the industry. In fact, Level 2 starts for under-19s have fallen by more than 20% since 2017/18 compared to a 326% rise in the number of those aged 25+ starting a Level 6/7 apprenticeship.

However, where apprentices are employed in construction businesses, the majority are still undertaking a Level 2 apprenticeship (46%), followed by a Level 3 apprenticeship (29%), although Level 2 starts have fallen significantly since 2017/18 when they accounted for 65% of all starts.

The proportion of Level 6/7 starts has increased from around 5% in 2017/18 to a point where they represent one in six (16%) of all starts.



Construction apprenticeship starts by detailed level 2017/18 to 2024/25, England



The UK Government has replaced the Apprenticeship Levy with a new Growth and Skills Levy, designed to give employers greater flexibility to use their funding for a broader range of training. One of the government's early priorities under the Growth and Skills Levy has been to rebalance apprenticeship funding towards younger learners and occupations experiencing skills shortages. This reflects concerns that, under the previous Apprenticeship Levy, an increasing share of funding was being used to support higher-level apprenticeships undertaken by existing employees rather than helping new entrants into skilled occupations. Under the new arrangements, future funding eligibility will increasingly be guided by assessed skills needs, employer demand, and consultation with sector bodies.

Level 7 apprenticeships, equivalent to a master's degree, are typically undertaken by existing employees or graduates seeking to upskill while remaining in work. While valuable for professional development, they

are less suited to supporting new entrants into the labour market and have become increasingly controversial because they absorbed a growing share of apprenticeship funding that could otherwise have been directed towards entry-level apprenticeships in priority sectors such as construction.

As one of the first major changes under the new policy, government funding for most adult entrants to Level 7 apprenticeships was withdrawn from January 2026. Public funding is now largely limited to learners aged 16 to 21, with employers choosing to offer Level 7 apprenticeships to older workers expected to meet the full cost themselves.

The reform is intended to redirect more of the Growth and Skills Levy towards supporting younger people entering the workforce. However, funding alone is unlikely to increase apprenticeship numbers. Employer capacity, administrative requirements and the complexity of navigating the apprenticeship system all continue to act as barriers. In addition, the availability and

accessibility of suitable training providers, together with the absence of appropriate apprenticeship standards in some occupations, can limit opportunities for both employers and prospective apprentices.

Survey findings reinforce this. Aside from not recruiting at all or having insufficient work (26%), the most common reason employers give for not offering apprenticeships is that their business is too small (20%). Others cite the time required to support an apprentice (15%) or the costs involved (11%)⁹, suggesting that practical business constraints remain as important as funding.

Despite a cooling labour market and continued economic uncertainty driven by domestic and global political developments, geopolitical conflict, persistent inflationary pressures and rising business costs, there are still signs that employers are looking to recruit. Yet many do not appear to view apprenticeships as part of their recruitment strategy, despite relatively high levels of youth unemployment indicating there is no shortage of young people seeking opportunities. This highlights a continued need to raise awareness of the benefits of employing apprentices, as well as to improve support in identifying appropriate apprenticeship standards and suitable candidates.

Survey findings indicate that employers are divided on whether the industry has sufficient capacity to provide apprenticeship opportunities. Around a third (32%) believed there are more people wanting to become apprentices than there are positions available, while a similar proportion (33%) disagreed and 35% were unsure¹⁰. Larger employers were more likely to hold this view, as were employers in Scotland and Wales compared with England. Taken alongside relatively high levels of youth unemployment, these findings suggest there is a perception that the supply of potential apprentices may exceed the number of opportunities currently being offered, reinforcing the importance of encouraging more employers to recruit apprentices where capacity allows.

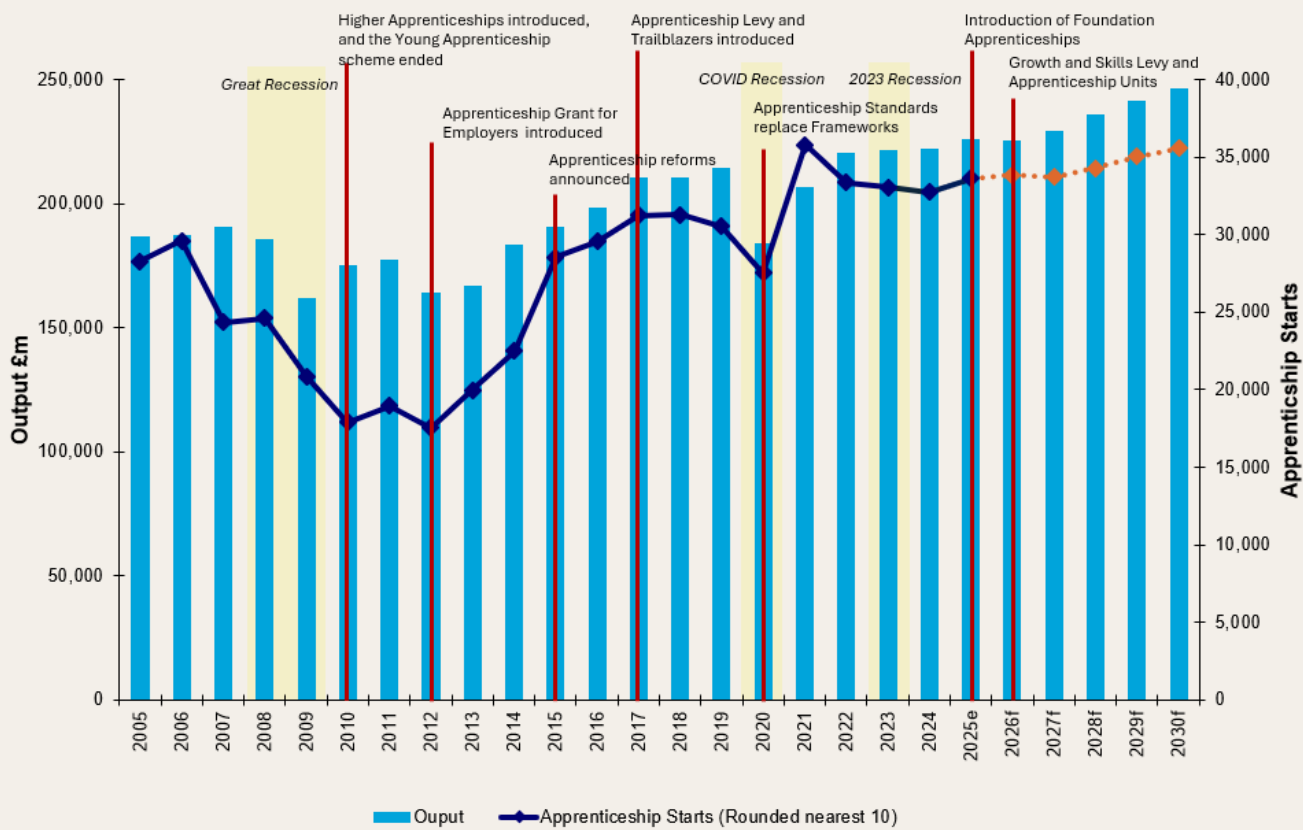
Understanding what motivates employers to take on apprentices is essential. Business need remains the most common driver, with seven in 10 (71%) employers citing it as a reason¹¹. Many report that decisions are closely linked to an increase in turnover or having a clear pipeline of current and future work – factors that provide the confidence needed to invest in training and long-term workforce development.

Historically, periods of greater stability or steady growth tend to be accompanied with an increase in apprenticeship starts.

Around three times the number of apprenticeship starts are needed to keep pace with demand over the medium-term.

⁹Ibid
¹⁰Ibid
¹¹CITB Skills and Training in the Construction Industry 2023 (September 2024)

Apprenticeship starts and construction output 2003/04 to 2023/24 and projections to 2029/30, Great Britain



Projected apprenticeship starts and achievements

Assuming no major changes to apprenticeship policy, the projected period of sustained output growth from 2026 to 2030 is expected to support a gradual increase in apprenticeship starts following an anticipated dip in 2026. However, the forecast suggests that apprenticeship starts will continue to lag behind the expansion in construction activity, reflecting the structural barriers that are expected to constrain employer participation. The introduction of Foundation Apprenticeships and Apprenticeship Units adds to an expanding range of training options, alongside Modular and Flexi-Job Apprenticeships, although it remains too early to assess whether these reforms will deliver a significant increase in overall apprenticeship numbers.

The forecast is underpinned by the expectation that underlying demand for construction workers will remain robust. Although labour market conditions have cooled, employers continue to report significant recruitment pressures, suggesting that demand for new entrants is likely to persist.

Currently, there are around 33,000 advertised job vacancies in the construction sector – around 22% above their pre-pandemic level (January to March 2020) and almost a third (32%) higher than the long-term average¹². Despite a much softer labour market, around a quarter (23%) of construction businesses still report that finding suitably skilled staff is their main challenge¹³.

Against this backdrop, the apprentices currently in training represent a significant pipeline of future skilled workers. It is estimated that around 53,000 will achieve their qualification over the next two years¹⁴.

However, achieving an apprenticeship does not automatically translate into an immediate increase in the workforce. Only about six in 10 (55%) who achieve their apprenticeship immediately enter full employment, although others will continue in training (38%)¹⁵.



This underlines why increasing apprenticeship starts alone will not be enough to meet the industry's future workforce needs. Meeting the industry's annual recruitment needs through apprenticeships alone would require two to three times the number of apprentices currently starting training, given current levels of attrition. This is clearly unachievable in the short term, even if it were desirable. This reinforces the importance of other routes into construction, particularly further education, which has the scale to make a substantial contribution to the industry's future workforce alongside apprenticeships. Improving achievement rates is therefore likely to be the quickest way of increasing the supply of qualified construction workers. Ensuring that more apprentices successfully complete their training and enter employment would strengthen the industry's skills pipeline without relying solely on substantial growth in apprenticeship starts. However, while demand for skilled workers remains high and is forecast to increase over the medium term, employers remain cautious about taking on apprentices. This makes it even more important that the industry does not rely on a single route into employment. FE and other training pathways will

remain critical to meeting workforce demand, particularly where employers are unable or unwilling to create sufficient apprenticeship opportunities. This suggests that apprenticeships will continue to play a vital, though not exclusive, role in addressing workforce gaps. The success of other training routes will likely depend on how well they can offer the same practical relevance, structured progression and credibility that have long defined the apprenticeship model. At a time when experienced workers remain difficult to recruit and demand for skills is expected to grow, apprenticeships should be viewed not simply as a training activity, but as a strategic investment in future business capability, productivity and resilience.

For employers, this means apprenticeships should be viewed not only as an investment in future skills, but also as an investment in business productivity, resilience and long-term growth. Developing talent internally can help businesses reduce reliance on an increasingly competitive labour market while building the capability needed to respond to future demand.

To boost the number of starts and completions the industry needs to showcase apprenticeship success stories to highlight the benefits of hiring an apprentice.

¹²Office for National Statistics, Labour market overview, UK: June 2026 (Release date: 18 June 2026 <https://www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peopleinwork/employmentandemployeetypes/bulletins/uklabourmarket/june2026>)

¹³CITB Quarterly Dip Survey: Quarter 1 2026 (April 2026)

¹⁴Department for Education (England), Apprenticeships <https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/apprenticeships>, Skills Development Scotland, Modern Apprenticeship Statistics <https://www.skillsdevelopmentscotland.co.uk/publications-statistics/statistics/modern-apprenticeships?page=1&statisticCategoryId=4&order=date-desc>, and Welsh Government, StatsWales - Apprenticeships <https://stats.gov.wales/en-GB/topic/14/apprenticeships>

¹⁵CITB Destinations of Construction Learners in Further Education (June 2017)

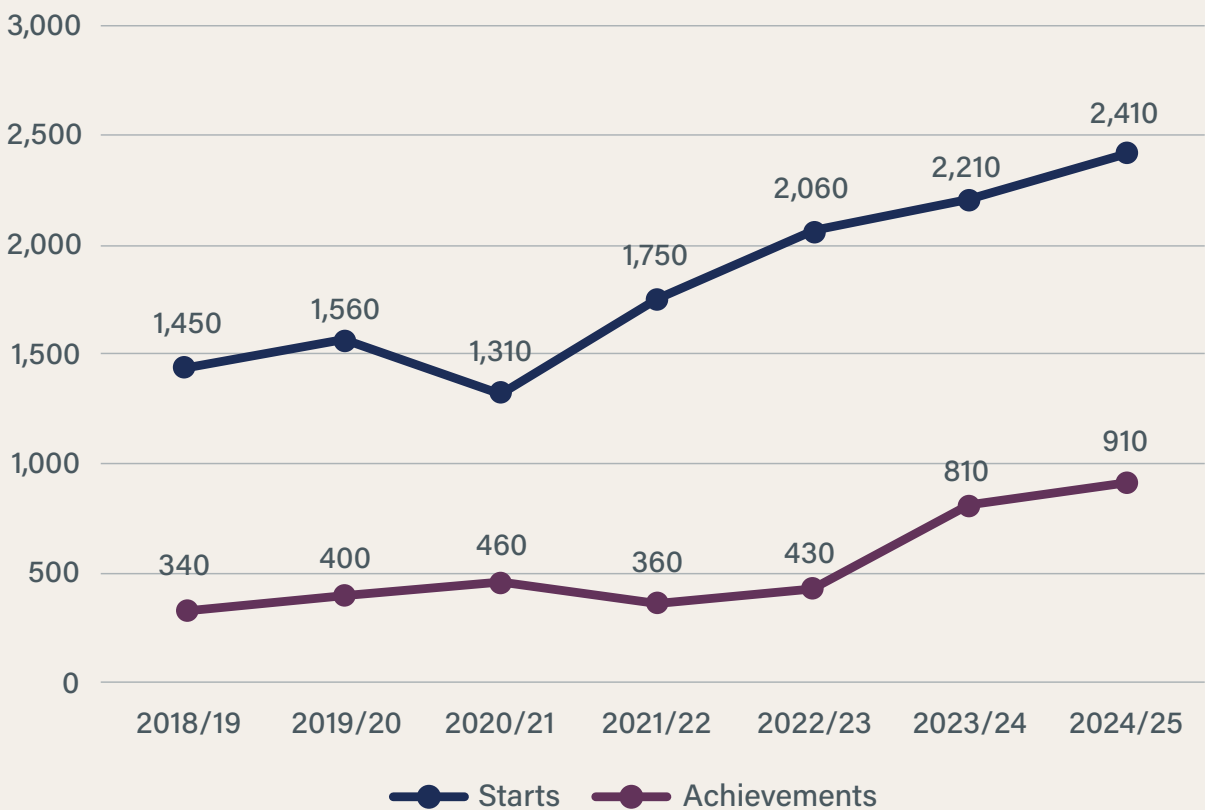
How construction apprenticeships are changing

Unless otherwise stated, all figures cited in this section relate to construction apprenticeships in England only.

The number of females starting construction apprenticeships has risen sharply in recent years, increasing by two-thirds (66%) from 1,450 in 2018/19 to 2,410 in 2024/25¹⁶. Achievement numbers have also accelerated, increasing from 340 in 2018/19 to 910 in 2024/25 – almost tripling over the period. Understanding what is driving this growth is important in

assessing how sustainable it is. Interestingly, the increase has not been confined to higher-level apprenticeships. In 2024/25, Level 2 and Level 3 apprenticeships accounted for almost a third (31%) of female starts, while Level 4 and Level 6 accounted for a further 56%. Level 7 accounted for 13% of female starts. Although female participation has grown strongly at Level 7 from a relatively small base, the overall increase therefore reflects broader growth across the apprenticeship system rather than being driven solely by higher-level provision.

Female starts and achievement year-on-year, England 2018/19 - 2024/25

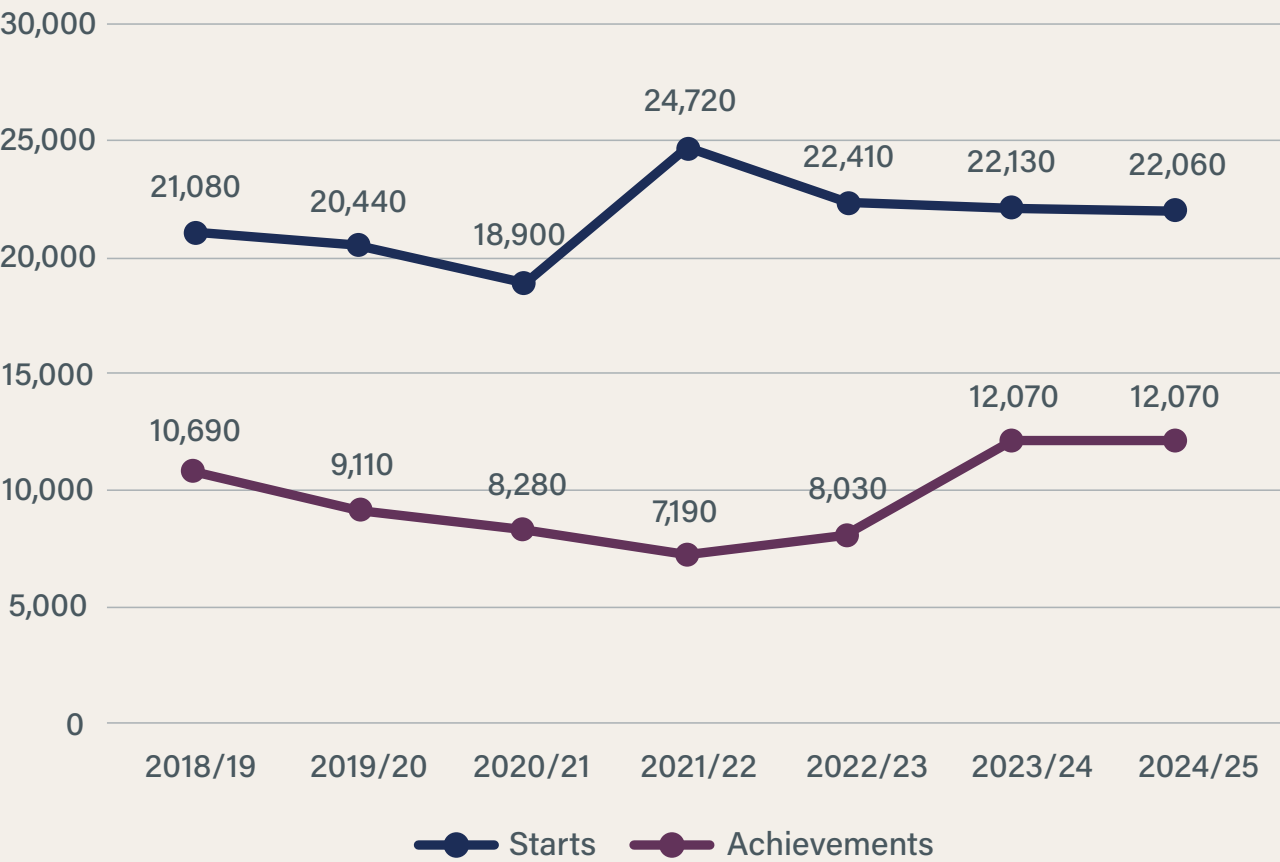


Male apprenticeship starts increased by over 17%, from 21,080 in 2018/19 to a peak of 24,720 in 2021/22. They have since fallen back, declining to around 22,000 a year, where they have broadly plateaued since

2022/23. Male apprenticeship achievements fell by a third (33%) between 2018/19 and 2021/22, from 10,690 to 7,190, but have since recovered to 12,070 in 2024/25 – around 13% above their 2018/19 level.

¹⁶Department for Education (England), Apprenticeships explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/apprenticeships

Male starts and achievements year-on-year, England 2018/19 – 2024/25



While the numbers remain relatively small, the rise in female apprenticeship starts suggests the industry is moving towards greater gender diversity in traditionally male-dominated occupations. Continued progress will depend on maintaining efforts to improve the attractiveness and accessibility of construction careers for women, helping to widen the industry's recruitment pool and address long-term skills shortages.

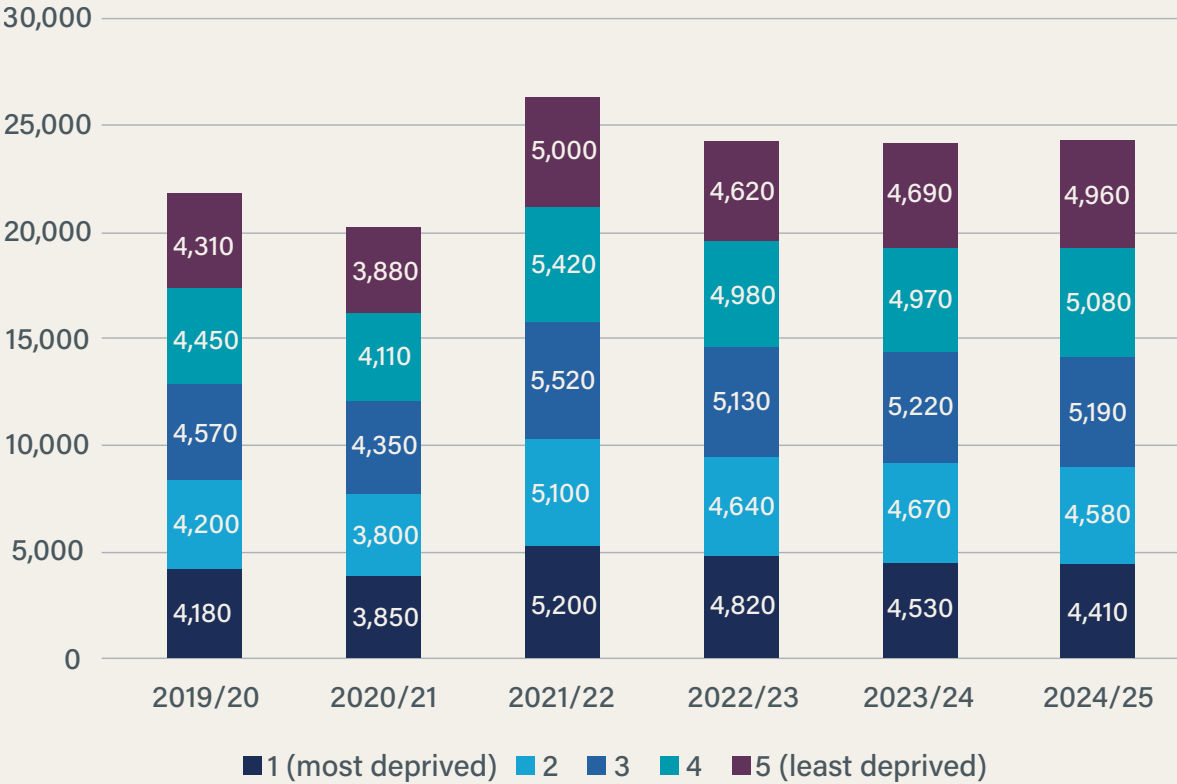
Deprivation

Apprenticeships can be a powerful driver of social mobility, providing people with valuable skills, qualifications and practical experience, with many progressing into long-term careers or self-employment. However, inequalities in access remain. While overall construction apprenticeship

starts have stabilised in recent years, starts among learners from the most deprived communities have continued to decline. Between 2020/21 and 2024/25, starts from the most deprived areas fell by around 11%, compared with a much smaller reduction among those from the least deprived communities. This presents a challenge for policymakers who see skills and training as an important route to improving social mobility, particularly for those from disadvantaged backgrounds.

¹⁷Social Security Advisory Committee and Department for Work and Pensions, SSAC Occasional Paper 27: The influence of the social security system on educational and vocational decision-making at age 16 (Published 23 April 2026) https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/69e793d1d36883a64473b7d5/SSAC_Report_on_young_people.pdf

Number of starts in construction by deprivation level, England 2019/20 – 2024/25



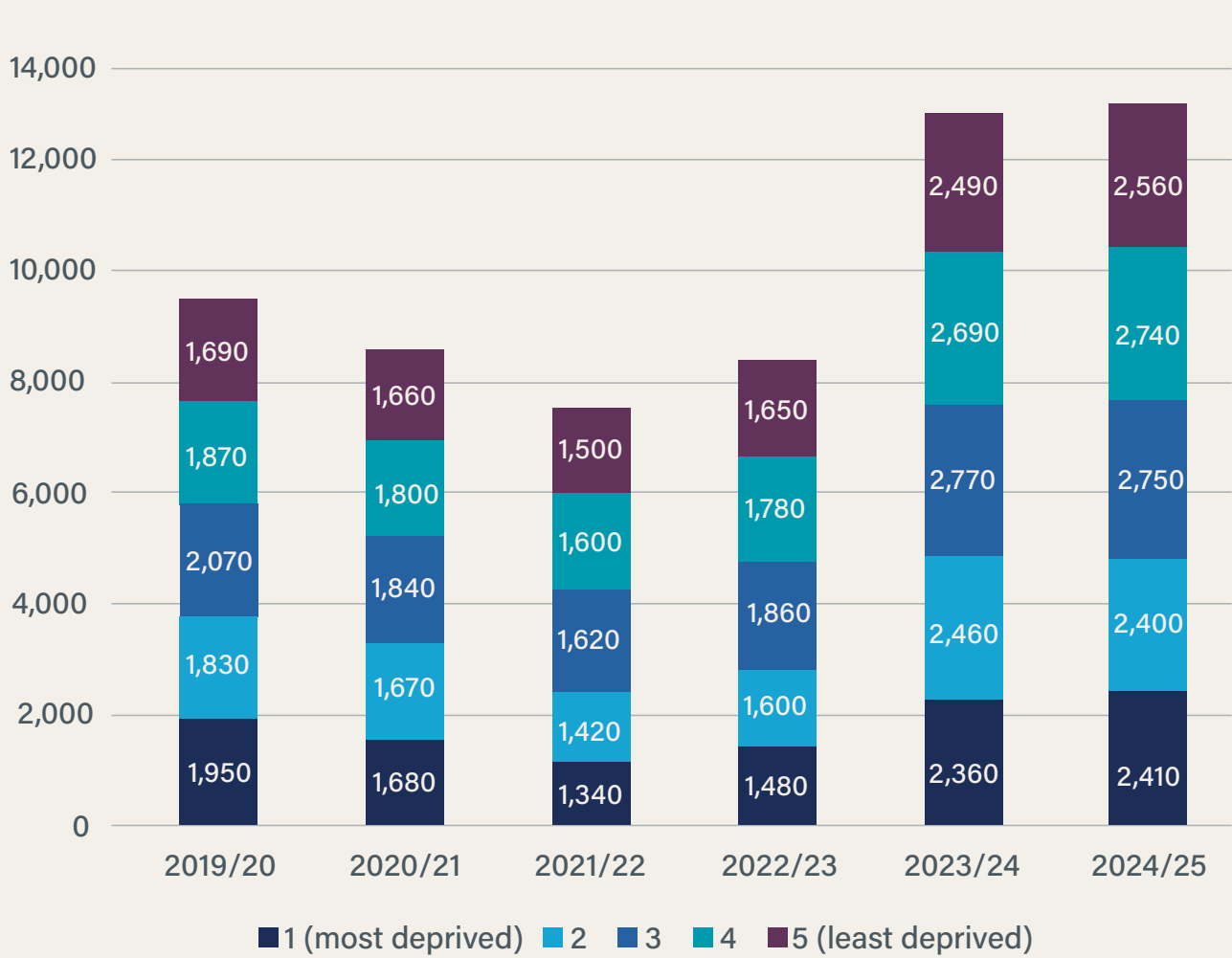
One possible explanation is that learners from more deprived backgrounds face greater financial pressures, making immediate employment more attractive than undertaking an apprenticeship that offers longer-term career and earnings benefits. Recent evidence from the Social Security Advisory Committee (SSAC) highlights a more specific financial barrier: when a young person moves from full-time education into an apprenticeship, their family can lose elements of Child Benefit and Universal Credit, potentially leaving some households significantly worse off¹⁷. There is evidence that this financial shock can influence young people's decisions about whether to take up or remain in an apprenticeship, with the impact likely to be greatest among some disadvantaged households. The government has subsequently recognised this barrier, introducing a new bursary of up to £4,500 a year for eligible households from August 2026, alongside fully funded apprenticeship training for eligible under-25s.

The bursary is specifically intended to offset the loss of household benefits that can otherwise make taking up an apprenticeship financially unattractive¹⁸. Others may encounter additional barriers, including transport costs, limited access to technology, caring responsibilities or weaker support networks, all of which can make completing an apprenticeship more challenging. The allocation of apprenticeship funding may also have influenced access. The greater use of levy funding for Level 7 apprenticeships, which are typically undertaken by existing employees, may have reduced the scope for employers to create new apprenticeship opportunities, potentially limiting access for those from more deprived backgrounds who are more reliant on apprenticeships as an entry route into skilled employment.

Learners from the most deprived backgrounds also remain less likely to successfully complete their apprenticeship than those from more affluent areas.

¹⁸Department for Work and Pensions and Department for Education, Press release Government invests in young people with more opportunities close to home (Published 28 July 2026) <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/government-invests-in-young-people-with-more-opportunities-close-to-home>

Number of achievements in construction by deprivation level, England 2019/20 – 2024/25



However, the gap has narrowed considerably over the past two years as achievement rates have improved across all deprivation groups. In 2021/22, the achievement rate for learners from the most deprived communities was around ten percentage points lower than for

those from the least deprived areas (47.1% compared with 57.1%). By 2024/25, this gap had narrowed to just over three percentage points (56.4% compared with 59.8%), reflecting a particularly strong improvement among learners from the most deprived backgrounds¹⁹.

¹⁹Department for Education (England), Apprenticeships explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/apprenticeships

Achievement rate by deprivation level, England 2020/21 – 2024/25

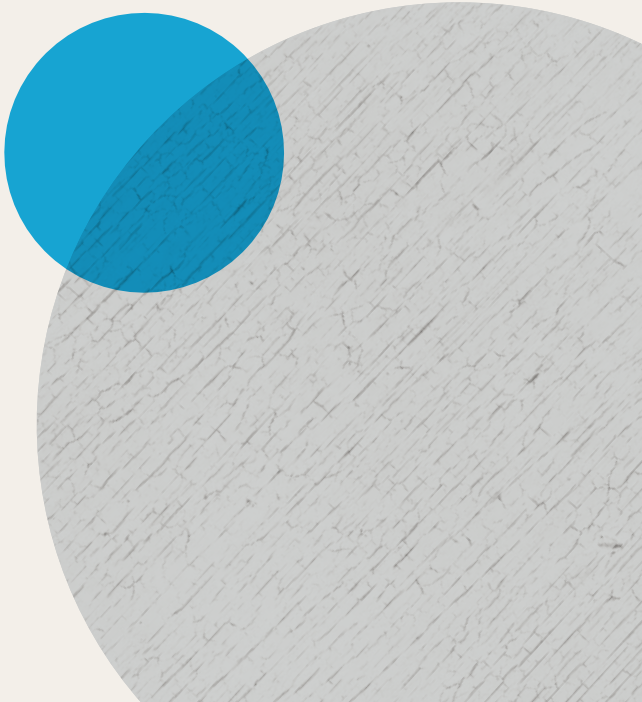
	1 (most deprived)	2	3	4	5 (least deprived)
2020/21	54.8%	55.9%	59.3%	61.6%	60.8%
2021/22	47.1%	51.8%	55.7%	56.3%	57.1%
2022/23	46.7%	49.3%	53.1%	53.4%	51.8%
2023/24	50.8%	55.4%	57.1%	56.3%	57.8%
2024/25	56.4%	55.8%	58.9%	60.2%	59.8%

Achievement rates declined across all deprivation groups during and immediately after the pandemic before recovering strongly over the past two academic years. Although learners from the most deprived communities continue to record the lowest achievement rates overall, the narrowing of the attainment gap suggests that some of the inequalities exacerbated by the pandemic have begun to ease.

Despite this encouraging improvement, participation remains a concern. If construction is to fully realise the potential of apprenticeships as a route to social mobility, the industry will need not only to improve completion rates but also to reverse the decline in starts among learners from the most deprived communities. Doing so would help broaden the industry's future talent pool while ensuring that the opportunities created by apprenticeships are accessible to those who stand to benefit from them most.

Diversity

Although construction apprenticeships remain dominated by white learners [see Appendix Figure 9], participation from minority ethnic learners has increased substantially over recent years. Indexed to 2018/19, apprenticeship starts by minority ethnic learners have almost doubled²⁰, while starts by white learners have remained broadly unchanged overall. This suggests that recent growth in construction apprenticeships has increasingly been driven by broader participation from under-represented groups rather than increases across the wider population.



Construction apprenticeship starts by ethnicity (Index: 2018/19 = 100), England 2018/19 – 2024/25



Broadening participation remains important if the industry is to maximise the available talent pool. However, apprenticeships do not automatically provide an inclusive route into skilled employment. Recent evidence on degree apprenticeships found that disadvantaged young people were under-represented compared with both the wider undergraduate population and students at Russell Group universities, highlighting the risk that higher-level apprenticeship opportunities can become concentrated among those who are already relatively advantaged²¹. Reforms such as Foundation Apprenticeships and Apprenticeship Units are intended to widen access by providing a more flexible entry route for young people who may not yet be ready for a full apprenticeship, while helping employers engage with a broader range of

potential recruits. However, their potential to expand construction participation has yet to be realised at scale, with employers and government reporting limited take-up in the sector to date. Their longer-term impact will depend on whether employers see them as a useful route into skilled employment and whether clear progression pathways into full apprenticeships are established. The evidence presented throughout this report suggests that the greater constraints are creating sufficient apprenticeship opportunities and ensuring more apprentices successfully complete their training, rather than a lack of potential applicants. Broadening participation should therefore be viewed as complementary to, rather than a substitute for, increasing employer participation and improving achievement rates.

²⁰Department for Education (England), Apprenticeships <https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/apprenticeships>
²¹Education Policy Institute, Youth degree apprenticeships: An alternative to university? (November 2025) <https://epi.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2025/10/EPI-Degree-Apprenticeships-Report-FINAL.pdf>
²²Department for Business and Trade, Business population estimates for the UK and regions 2025: statistical release (Published 2 October 2025) <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/business-population-estimates-2025>
²³Department for Education (England), Apprenticeships <https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/apprenticeships>

Regional differences in employer participation

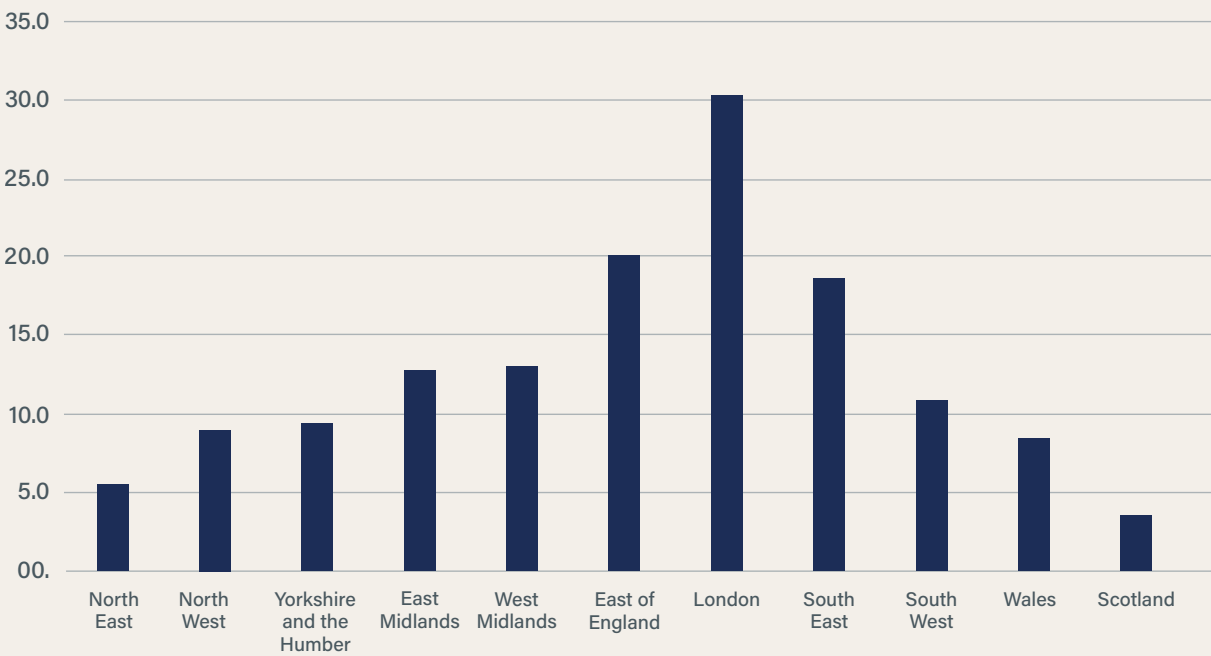
Significant regional differences exist in the extent to which construction businesses recruit apprentices. While all nations and regions are dominated by micro-businesses, the relationship between the size of the construction sector and apprenticeship starts varies considerably.

London's apprenticeship performance appears disproportionately weak relative to the size of its construction business base. The capital has around 62,400 construction businesses²², the second largest concentration of any nation or region in Great Britain, yet recorded only around 2,070 construction apprenticeship starts in 2024/25²³. This was fewer than the North West, Yorkshire and the Humber, the South East, the South West and Scotland,

despite London having a substantially larger construction business base than all of those areas except the South East.

Expressed another way, London has around 30 construction businesses for every apprenticeship start, compared with around 19 in the South East, 20 in the East of England, 13 in the West Midlands, 12 in the South West, nine in the North West and Yorkshire and the Humber, six in the North East, eight in Wales, and fewer than four in Scotland. While apprenticeship starts are not a direct measure of employer investment in training, they provide a useful proxy and suggest that London generates substantially fewer apprenticeship opportunities relative to the size of its construction sector than any other nation or region in Great Britain.

Number of businesses per apprentice, 2025



The same pattern is evident when apprenticeship starts are compared with the size of the construction workforce. London records around 8.5 apprenticeship starts per 1,000 construction workers, the lowest rate of any nation or region in Great Britain. This compares with around 10 per 1,000 in the South East and East of England, 16–17 per 1,000 across much of the Midlands, Yorkshire and Wales, more than

22 per 1,000 in the North West, almost 25 per 1,000 in the North East, and over 42 per 1,000 in Scotland. While regional differences in occupational mix and business structure will influence these figures, the consistency of the findings across both measures suggests that London's relatively weak apprenticeship performance cannot be explained by the size of its construction sector alone.

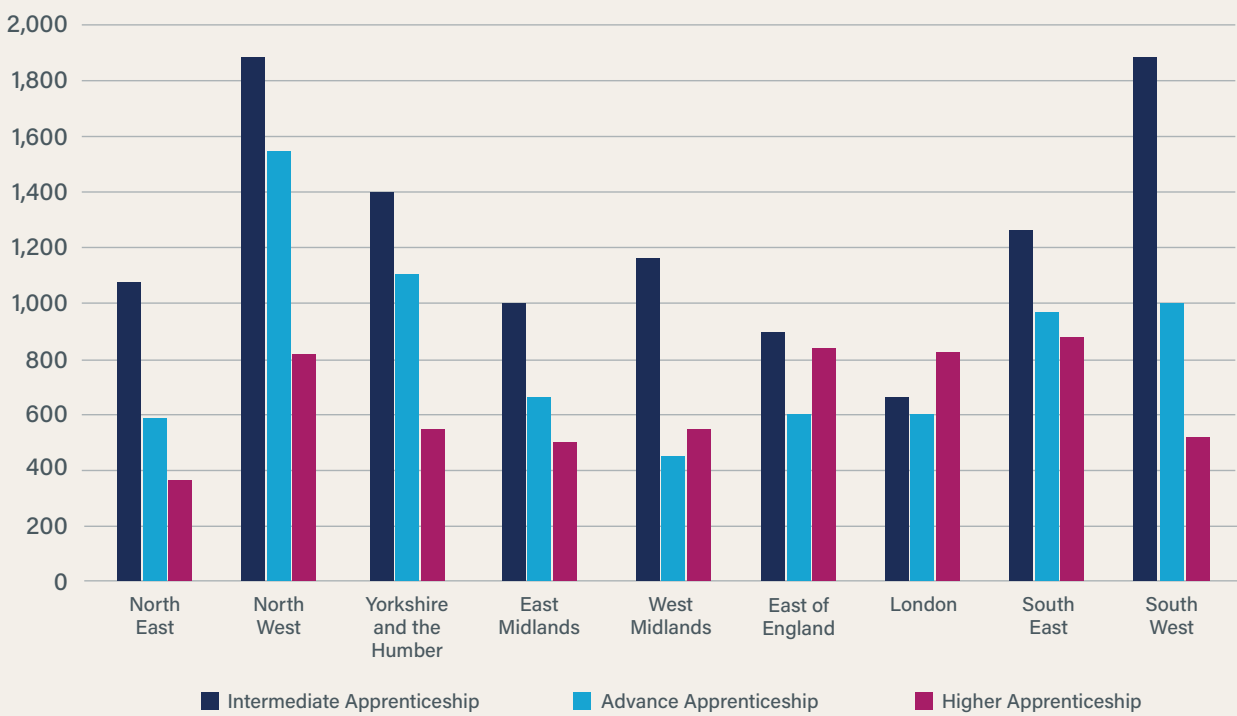
Construction apprenticeship starts per 1,000 workers, by nation and region, 2024/25

	Workforce	Starts per 1,000 Workers
North East	81,840	23.5
North West	186,970	21.0
Yorkshire and the Humber	177,630	16.0
East Midlands	144,920	14.4
West Midlands	197,920	11.3
East of England	238,280	10.1
London	232,460	8.9
South East	309,310	11.0
South West	194,970	17.0
Wales	103,740	16.8
Scotland	154,120	42.3

The profile of apprenticeship provision also differs. London records comparatively fewer Intermediate Apprenticeships, traditionally associated with entry into construction trades, but relatively high numbers of Higher Apprenticeships in professional and technical occupations. This reflects London's concentration of head offices, consultancies and major

contractors, where occupations such as construction management, quantity surveying and civil engineering are more prevalent. While this partly explains London's apprenticeship profile, it does not fully account for the comparatively low overall level of apprenticeship activity relative to the size of its construction sector.

Construction apprenticeship starts by region and level, 2024/25



This pattern cannot be explained simply by business size. Like every other nation and region, London's construction industry is overwhelmingly made up of micro-businesses, while its proportion of small, medium and large employers is broadly comparable with elsewhere. Instead, the findings appear more consistent with the distinctive characteristics of London's labour market.

Construction employers in London have access to a much larger and more fluid labour market than elsewhere in Great Britain. Businesses can recruit experienced workers from across the South East and East of England, alongside migrant labour and a highly mobile workforce willing to travel significant distances. This reduces the immediate pressure to invest in apprenticeships. At the same time, higher operating costs, fragmented subcontracting arrangements, shorter project cycles and greater reliance on labour-only subcontractors may discourage longer-term investment in training.

This creates something of a paradox. London experiences some of the highest construction vacancy rates and skills shortages in Great Britain yet appears to generate relatively few apprenticeship opportunities relative to the size of its construction sector. By contrast, Scotland and Wales both generate substantially more apprenticeship starts, reflecting different labour market characteristics as well as differences in apprenticeship policy, funding and delivery. Together, the findings reinforce one of the central themes of this report: construction's apprenticeship challenge is no longer simply about attracting young people into the industry. In some parts of the country, particularly London, the greater challenge appears to be increasing employer participation in apprenticeships and reducing reliance on recruiting experienced workers from elsewhere.

Employers' perspective of apprenticeships

Employers who provide apprenticeships do so because they know it benefits their business. Firms which started providing apprenticeships in the last five years thought it was a good way to recruit and train new staff, as well as upskilling existing staff.

Apprentices are seen as a way of succession planning, making it easier to attract and recruit young people. They also offer the opportunity for more diversity and inclusion in the construction industry.

The most common benefit businesses report is that apprenticeships allow them to train people the way that they want, or to mould them to how they do things (86%). The second most common reason is that apprenticeships allow the business to improve or to maintain skill levels (53%), while a third of businesses (37%) say they improve productivity²⁴.

Survey findings repeatedly reinforce the view that employers offering apprenticeships generally see them as a long-term investment rather than simply a short-term recruitment solution²⁵. As skills shortages persist across much of the industry, apprenticeships remain one of the few recruitment routes that allow employers to develop workers with the specific technical skills and behaviours their business requires.

Businesses are also increasingly identifying social benefit or community benefit-related drivers for offering apprenticeships. The proportion identifying corporate social responsibility as a benefit has increased markedly from 18% to 29%²⁶.

The benefits of taking on an apprentice

1. It's a more cost-effective way to recruit staff
2. It can improve productivity
3. They inject a breath of fresh air into a business
4. They develop specific skills, based on business needs
5. An extra pair of hands can allow an employer to take on more work
6. Apprenticeships can be flexibly tailored to the needs of a business
7. Employing an apprentice can teach your workforce new skills
8. Businesses can attract the very best in future talent.

Despite these benefits, many employers believe the industry's ability to offer apprenticeships is constrained. Survey evidence²⁷ also suggests that a sizeable proportion of employers believe the industry's capacity to offer apprenticeships is constrained. Opinion was evenly divided on whether there are more people wanting to become construction apprentices than there are apprenticeship opportunities available. Around a third (32%) believed demand exceeded the number of available positions, a similar proportion (33%) disagreed, while just over a third (35%) were unsure. However, larger employers were more likely to perceive a shortage of apprenticeship opportunities, with almost half (49%) of businesses employing 100 or more people believing there were more prospective apprentices than available positions, compared with around a third of smaller employers.

Employers in Scotland (45%) and Wales (41%) were also more likely than those in England (30%) to believe that demand for apprenticeships exceeds the number of opportunities available. Taken together, these findings suggest that while views differ, there is a widespread perception that the industry's capacity to offer apprenticeships may be limiting participation as much as the willingness of young people to enter the sector.

This reflects a wider issue of the industry's capacity to absorb new apprentices. Increasing starts assumes that employers have both the confidence and the capacity to create appropriate apprenticeship roles, provide the necessary supervision and support, and sustain those opportunities through to completion. In a sector dominated by small businesses and characterised by fluctuating workloads, this capacity cannot be assumed simply because there is demand from prospective apprentices.

More broadly, the evidence suggests that apprenticeship participation reflects the wider health and confidence of construction businesses. Employers that lack certainty over future workloads, have limited management capacity or rely heavily on sub-contracting are less likely to invest in developing apprentices, regardless of the level of financial support available. This helps explain why increases in financial incentives alone have not consistently translated into sustained growth in apprenticeship numbers.

²⁴CITB Skills and Training in the Construction Industry 2023 (September 2024)

²⁵CITB Employer Panel Employer: Attitudes and Motivations regarding Learning and Training (September 2025)

²⁶Ibid

²⁷Ibid

How can more employers be encouraged to take on apprentices?

If the challenge is to encourage more employers to take on apprentices, what would make a difference?

Research by CITB suggests that, while some employers have no intention of taking on apprentices, for others support would make a real difference.

For employers who do take on apprentices, about a third (34%) value funding. A similar proportion (31%) say help with identifying apprentices and screening potential candidates (29%) are important factors²⁸.

For those who don't employ apprentices, around one in six (16%) firms indicate that funding would make a difference. Help with finding a training provider and organising the process are also popular, with 15% and 11% of businesses who currently employ apprentices respectively identifying these factors²⁹. They also scored highly among businesses who do not employ apprentices.

This suggests that financial incentives alone might not be sufficient to attract new employers into offering apprenticeships. It also lends weight to the view that incentivising new businesses to offer apprenticeships requires active support, including non-financial help.

This is particularly relevant for smaller employers, many of whom recruit apprentices only occasionally and have limited capacity to navigate what can appear to be a complex apprenticeship system. Practical support that reduces administrative burden and helps employers identify suitable standards, training providers and candidates may therefore have as much influence on participation as financial incentives.

Encouraging wider employer participation is not only key to expanding the number of apprenticeship opportunities, but also to improving achievement and completion rates. While there is no definitive evidence that either small or large firms consistently achieve better outcomes, the type of support they provide does matter. Larger employers may benefit from more structured training resources, but smaller businesses can offer closer mentoring and more tailored support, which can also contribute significantly to successful outcomes. Ensuring employers are well-supported to offer apprenticeships – in ways that work for their size, capacity, and sector – is therefore vital both for uptake and for apprentices' success.

Ultimately, increasing apprenticeship numbers will depend not only on attracting more young people into construction but also on giving more employers, particularly SMEs, the confidence and capability to recruit and support apprentices successfully. Achieving this would help strengthen the industry's long-term skills pipeline while enabling businesses to address immediate recruitment challenges.

Getting micro and small firms to take on an apprentice is key to unlocking growth in apprenticeship starts.

²⁸CITB Skills and Training in the Construction Industry 2023 (September 2024)
²⁹Ibid

Opportunities for apprenticeships across England, Scotland, and, Wales

In Scotland and Wales, apprenticeship achievement rates are significantly higher than in England, exceeding 70% in the case of Scotland.

Apprenticeship achievement rates in construction by nation, 2018/19 to 2024/25

Nation	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25
England - Construction & Built Environment	65.0%	63.1%	58.5%	53.6%	51.0%	55.5%	58.3%
Scotland - Construction & Related	79.0%	78.0%	81.0%	75.4%	72.3%	72.9%	78.4%
Wales - Construction	79.0%	^	^	71.0%	73.0%	68.0%	64.0%

^ The standard performance measures were not produced in academic years 2019/20 and 2020/21 due to the disruption of the pandemic.

Aside from increasing apprenticeship starts among small businesses, which arguably represents the single greatest opportunity to expand apprenticeship numbers overall, improving achievement rates is likely to be the quickest way of increasing the supply of qualified construction workers. While Scotland continues to perform strongly, with achievement rates recovering to almost their pre-pandemic level, England remains some way below its 2018/19 performance despite recent improvements. Wales, meanwhile, has experienced a decline in achievement rates since reporting resumed following the pandemic. Together, these trends underline the importance of improving completion rates, ensuring that more apprentices who start their training go on to qualify and enter the workforce.

The apprenticeship landscape in England is undergoing its most significant reform since the introduction of the Apprenticeship Levy. The government has placed apprenticeships at the centre of its wider strategy to tackle youth unemployment, improve workforce participation and support economic growth, particularly in sectors such as construction where skills shortages continue to constrain delivery. Alongside wider reforms to technical education, the Growth and Skills Levy, Skills England and Foundation Apprenticeships are intended to create a more flexible skills system that responds more effectively to employer demand.

The first Foundation Apprenticeships were introduced in August 2025 across seven occupational areas, including three in construction. Designed primarily for young people aged 16 to 21, they provide a shorter, work-based route into employment for those not yet ready to undertake a full apprenticeship. Supported by employer incentive payments, they are intended to widen participation by reducing both financial risk for employers and barriers to entry for learners. The government has subsequently reinforced this approach through a wider package of youth employment measures, including enhanced financial support for smaller employers recruiting young apprentices and an ambition to create an additional 50,000 apprenticeships and Foundation Apprenticeships over the current Parliament.

Taken together, these reforms have the potential to strengthen the pipeline into construction. Foundation Apprenticeships may prove particularly valuable for young people who need additional workplace experience before progressing to a full apprenticeship, while financial incentives should encourage more SMEs to participate. However, their success will ultimately depend on progression. Without clear routes into full apprenticeships or sustained employment, there is a risk that Foundation Apprenticeships become an additional

destination rather than a stepping stone into skilled occupations. Similarly, there remains a possibility that some employers substitute Foundation Apprenticeships for traditional Level 2 apprenticeships, limiting any net increase in overall apprenticeship numbers.

Early indications are cautiously optimistic. Construction apprenticeship starts increased during the first half of the 2025/26 academic year despite a weaker labour market and growing economic uncertainty. However, survey evidence suggests employers remain cautious about recruitment as they respond to rising employment costs, persistent inflation, geopolitical uncertainty and an uncertain workload pipeline. These factors are likely to limit the pace at which apprenticeship numbers can grow, particularly amongst SMEs, which account for the vast majority of construction businesses.

The evidence throughout this report suggests that policy reform and additional funding, while welcome, are unlikely to be sufficient on their own. Employers consistently identify practical barriers including business capacity, administrative complexity, identifying suitable candidates and navigating the apprenticeship system as being at least as significant as funding. From August 2026, the government is removing another potential financial barrier for smaller employers by fully funding apprenticeship training for under-25s at non-levy-paying businesses, alongside a new £2,000 incentive for eligible SMEs recruiting young apprentices from October³⁰. These measures are intended to make it easier and more attractive for smaller employers to create apprenticeship opportunities, although their impact will ultimately depend on whether financial barriers are the principal reason businesses choose not to recruit. If England is to substantially increase apprenticeship numbers, future reforms

will need to make apprenticeships easier for employers to offer as well as more attractive for young people to undertake. That is likely to have a greater long-term impact than financial incentives alone.

Government is also seeking to use public procurement to increase employer participation. From January 2027, skills and training will carry greater weight in the assessment of major government contracts, with the minimum social-value weighting for contracts worth £5 million or more increasing from 10% to 20%. Bidders will be able to gain points for commitments including apprenticeships and work placements³¹. While the policy does not require suppliers to create apprenticeships, it creates a stronger commercial incentive for major contractors to invest in training and workforce development as part of their bids.

In Wales, the skills landscape continues to evolve following the establishment of Medr, which now has responsibility for funding, planning and oversight across the whole tertiary education and skills system.

Medr is redesigning the Welsh Apprenticeship Programme ahead of recommissioning in late 2026, with providers expected to deliver the new programme from 2027 onwards. The reforms are intended to create a more flexible apprenticeship system that is better aligned with regional labour market needs and priority sectors, including construction. One of its earliest interventions has been the reintroduction of Level 2 construction apprenticeships in pathways including bricklaying, site carpentry, scaffolding and building maintenance. This marks a significant shift from the previous policy of commencing all mainstream construction apprenticeships at Level 3, recognising concerns that removing the Level 2 entry route may have reduced accessibility for some learners and employers.

³⁰Department for Work and Pensions and Department for Education, Press release: Government invests in young people with more opportunities close to home (Published 28 July 2026) <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/government-invests-in-young-people-with-more-opportunities-close-to-home>
³¹Cabinet Office, Press release: Government orders that public spending must back British jobs and skills in every postcode (Published 5 August 2026) <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/government-orders-that-public-spending-must-back-british-jobs-and-skills-in-every-postcode>

Despite these reforms, construction apprenticeship starts in Wales fell sharply during 2024/25, reflecting wider reductions in apprenticeship funding following the loss of European Social Fund support. Construction recorded the largest sectoral fall in apprenticeship starts, while overall apprenticeship numbers across Wales reached their lowest level since comparable records began. Meanwhile Estyn's latest review of apprenticeships identified construction and the built environment as one of the weakest performing sectors for timely completion. Delays in assessment, shortages of assessors, qualification reform and inconsistent employer engagement were all identified as contributing factors. These findings suggest that increasing starts alone will not be sufficient to meet the demand for new entrants unless completion rates also improve.

Scotland continues to demonstrate comparatively strong apprenticeship performance compared to England and Wales. Construction and Related Modern Apprenticeships accounted for more than a quarter (27%) of all Modern Apprenticeship starts during 2025/26 and around one-third (33%) of all apprentices currently in training. Achievement rates have increased above 80% in 2025/26³², considerably higher than those seen elsewhere in Great Britain, reinforcing the important contribution Modern Apprenticeships continue to make to Scotland's construction workforce. Recognising this, the Scottish Budget for 2026/27 increased investment in apprenticeships to almost £200 million, supporting 25,000 Modern Apprenticeships, 5,000 Foundation Apprenticeships and at least 1,200 Graduate Apprenticeships, alongside more than 39,000 apprentices already in training. The Scottish Government has also signalled its longer-term ambition to expand apprenticeship opportunities further, including increasing Graduate Apprenticeships and introducing an Apprenticeship Accelerator Grant backed by Apprenticeship Levy funding.



³²Skills Development Scotland, Modern Apprenticeship Statistics Quarter 4 2025/26 (pg. 32). <https://www.skillsdevelopmentscotland.co.uk/media/u0dfvdpd/modern-apprenticeship-statistics-quarter-4-2025-26.pdf>

At a headline level, Scotland’s apprenticeship system appears to be performing strongly, but it is also entering a period of significant transition. Alongside reforms to governance and funding, colleges and training providers continue to face financial and operational pressures, while wider reviews of post-school education are considering how provision can be delivered more sustainably. Successfully managing this transition while maintaining current levels of apprenticeship delivery and achievement will be an important test of the reformed system.

Alongside this continued investment, Scotland’s post-school education and skills system is undergoing its most significant reform in a generation. The Tertiary Education and Training (Funding and Governance) (Scotland) Act 2026 provides the framework for transferring responsibility for apprenticeships and national training programmes from Skills Development Scotland to the Scottish Funding Council from April 2027. The legislation also requires Scottish Ministers to produce a national funding strategy for tertiary education, skills and apprenticeships and to review the college funding model. Separately, reviews of Modern Apprenticeship funding rates and the wider delivery model are now underway. These reforms have the potential to create a more integrated skills system, although important questions remain around future funding arrangements, employer engagement and delivery once responsibility transfers to the Scottish Funding Council.



Across both devolved nations there is growing recognition that apprenticeship policy must become more closely aligned with labour market need. In Scotland, construction has already been identified as one of the priority sectors for the development of national Skills Needs Assessments, while in Wales apprenticeship reform is increasingly being shaped around regional economic priorities. England may be able to learn from aspects of both systems. Scotland’s consistently strong achievement rates demonstrate the benefits of sustained employer engagement and stable apprenticeship delivery, while experience in Wales illustrates both the opportunities and risks associated with significant qualification reform. At the same time, each nation faces its own challenges. Scotland must ensure that major institutional reform does not disrupt a system that continues to perform well, while Wales now faces the task of rebuilding apprenticeship numbers and improving completion rates alongside wider reforms to the apprenticeship programme.

The three nations also take different approaches to apprenticeship funding. In Wales, apprenticeship training is generally fully funded by the Welsh Government, with employers typically meeting only wage costs. Scotland operates a contribution model, with the public sector funding a substantial proportion of training costs while employers may be asked to make additional contributions depending on the apprenticeship and provider. England, meanwhile, combines Growth and Skills Levy funding with government support and employer co-investment in some circumstances. While these differences may influence employer behaviour, recent experience suggests that funding arrangements alone do not determine apprenticeship performance. Wales has seen a sharp decline in starts despite fully funded training, while Scotland continues to achieve comparatively strong outcomes through a mixed funding model. The evidence presented throughout this report suggests that wider factors including employer confidence, business capacity, administrative complexity and the ability to support apprentices through to completion are likely to be just as important as funding in determining apprenticeship participation and success.

The capacity to deliver growth

Increasing apprenticeship numbers will require more than employer demand and policy reform. The capacity of the training system to respond will also be important. Across Great Britain, colleges and independent training providers continue to face recruitment and financial pressures, particularly in construction where experienced tradespeople can often command significantly higher earnings working on site than in education. The ambition to expand apprenticeship numbers also raises questions about who will deliver the additional provision. Further education colleges have an important role to play because of their existing relationships with employers, local communities and other parts of the education system, but many face the same capacity and employer-engagement pressures identified elsewhere in this report. In some areas, providers have reduced or consolidated provision, while shortages of tutors, assessors and specialist facilities have contributed to delays in training and assessment.

These pressures are evident to varying degrees across all three nations. In Wales, Estyn's recent review found that construction and the built environment remained a consistently underperforming sector for timely apprenticeship completion. It attributed this to a combination of qualification reform, including the removal of the Level 2 apprenticeship pathway, delays in external end-point assessment, difficulties gathering workplace evidence, and continuing shortages of assessors, all of which contributed to slower learner progression and lower completion rates³³.

Audit Scotland has cautioned that, while the ambition to create a simpler and more responsive skills system is well founded, progress has been slower than planned and key risks remain around governance, resourcing and delivery³⁴. Successfully managing this transition while maintaining current levels of apprenticeship provision and achievement will therefore be an important test of the reformed system, particularly given construction's continued reliance on Modern Apprenticeships as a primary route into the industry.

Meanwhile, in England, although recent investment in construction training is welcome, expanding apprenticeship numbers will ultimately depend on providers having the staff, facilities and financial resilience needed to meet increased demand. The Construction Skills Package includes a Teacher Industry Exchange scheme designed to address some of these pressures by bringing construction industry professionals into FE teaching while giving existing construction teachers opportunities to spend time in industry and maintain their sector knowledge. Recent increases in 16 to 19 funding allocations are also intended to help colleges and training providers address immediate recruitment and retention pressures, alongside rising pay and operational costs, while maintaining the quality of provision³⁵. This has been complemented by wider capital investment in specialist facilities, including the designation of Technical Excellence Colleges, which aim to strengthen employer partnerships, modernise technical training and support up to 40,000 additional learners in priority sectors, including construction, by 2029³⁶. However, much of this investment is intended to strengthen and modernise the existing training infrastructure rather than create wholly new capacity. Delivering sustained growth in construction apprenticeships will therefore continue to depend on providers being able to recruit and retain experienced tutors and assessors in an increasingly competitive labour market.

While the scale of these challenges varies between the three nations, they illustrate that increasing apprenticeship participation is not simply a question of creating more demand. Expanding apprenticeship numbers will depend not only on employer confidence and effective policy, but also on ensuring that training providers, assessors and colleges have the capability and resources to respond. There are also wider reforms underway to strengthen the quality and relevance of apprenticeship outcomes. In England, changes to apprenticeship assessment are intended to create a more flexible and proportionate approach while maintaining assurance of occupational competence, while work on occupational Competence Frameworks aims to ensure that training and assessment remain aligned with the skills required for employment.

More fundamentally, the focus on increasing starts risks obscuring a wider question about what a successful apprenticeship system should deliver. Higher participation is important, but expansion needs to be accompanied by improvements in completion, competence and progression into employment³⁷. A larger apprenticeship system will only strengthen the construction workforce if it produces more people who successfully complete their training and progress into skilled employment.

³³Estyn, Apprenticeships insights: Timely Completion Rates (Summer 2026) <https://estyn.gov.wales/app/uploads/2026/06/Apprenticeships-insights-Timely-Completion-Rates-.pdf>

³⁴Audit Scotland, Post-school education and skills reform (June 2026) https://audit.scot/uploads/2026-06/nr_260625_post-school_education_and_skills_reform.pdf

³⁵Department for Education, 16 to 19 funding: information for 2026 to 2027 (8 July 2026) <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/16-to-19-funding-information-for-2026-to-2027>

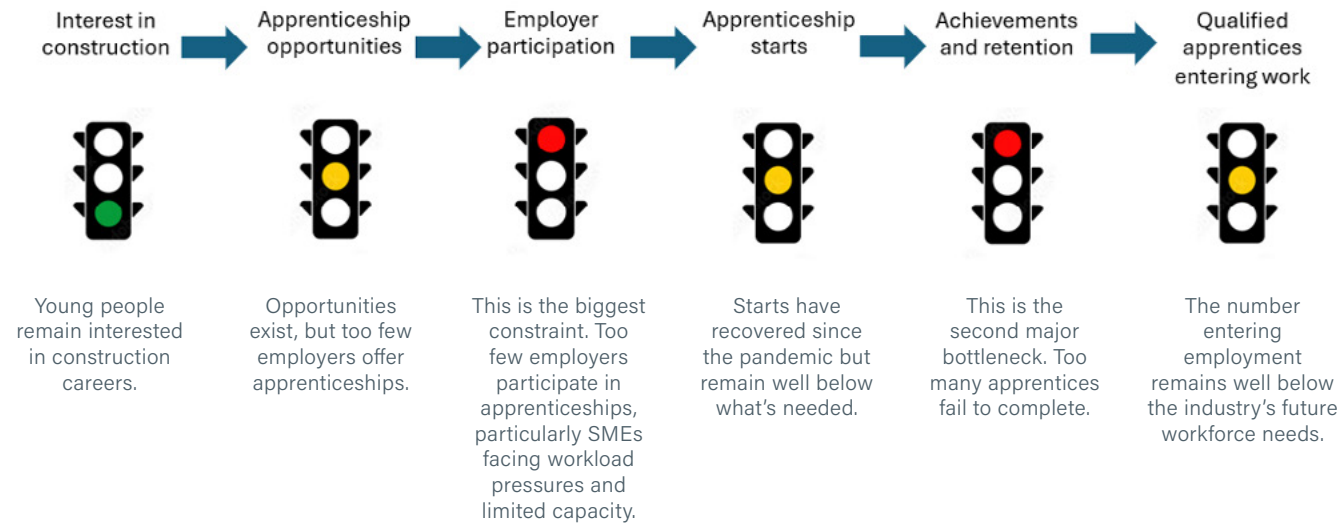
³⁶Department for Education, Press Release: Press release 40,000 people to get skills in new Technical Excellence Colleges (Published 12 August 2025)

³⁷Wonkhe, A gold standard apprenticeship system should mean expansion with universities and colleges at the centre (Published 13 July 2026) <https://wonkhe.com/blogs/a-gold-standard-apprenticeship-system-should-mean-expansion-with-universities-and-colleges-at-the-centre>

The bottom line

Construction has two apprenticeship challenges, not one. Too few employers recruit apprentices. Too few apprentices complete their training.

Construction has two apprenticeship bottlenecks



The evidence in this report suggests that construction's apprenticeship challenge is no longer primarily about attracting young people into the industry. Instead, the greater challenge is enabling more employers, particularly SMEs, to create apprenticeship opportunities and ensuring more apprentices successfully achieve their qualification and enter the workforce. Addressing those two issues would do more than any single policy change to strengthen the industry's future workforce.

Government policy is increasingly seeking to address the employer participation challenge by changing the incentives to recruit. For smaller employers, this means reducing the cost of taking on young apprentices through full funding and additional recruitment incentives. For larger contractors, greater weighting for skills and training in major public contracts creates a stronger commercial

incentive to offer apprenticeships and work placements. The direction of travel is therefore clear: make it cheaper for smaller employers to recruit and make investment in skills more commercially valuable for larger ones. But incentives can only go so far. Ultimately, apprenticeship growth will depend on whether employers have the confidence, capacity and workload to create opportunities – and whether the training system has the capacity to support them.

CITB's role in supporting apprenticeships

CITB's support for apprenticeships is delivered within the different apprenticeship systems operating across England, Scotland and Wales. In England, this includes the New Entrant Support Team (NEST), which provides free direct support to employers with recruitment, administration, funding and retention throughout an apprenticeship.

The New Entrant Support Team

The role of NEST is to work with employers to remove the barriers they may face employing and retaining new entrants, particularly apprentices.

Recruitment – Helping employers to get the right apprentice by signposting them to useful employment resources and helping advertise apprenticeship vacancies to attract potential candidates for free.

CITB Funding – The team makes sure employers are set up to receive CITB apprenticeship grants:

- Attendance grant: £2,500 (per year, per apprentice)
- Achievement grant: £3,500 (on successful completion of the apprenticeship).

Admin – Helping with paperwork, liaising with training providers, and setting up employers' Government Digital Account. This allows employers more time to focus on the job.

Retention – We stay in touch to make sure employers have the support they need to help their apprentice achieve and become a fully-fledged employee on completion.



CITB's role differs across the devolved nations, reflecting the different funding and delivery arrangements. In Scotland, CITB works alongside the Scottish Government's apprenticeship arrangements, with a dedicated team providing support to employers and apprentices and helping employers navigate the Scottish Modern Apprenticeship system. This includes supporting employers through the recruitment and training process and helping them access the funding and support available to them.

In Wales, CITB operates within the Welsh Apprenticeship Programme and its devolved funding and delivery arrangements, working with employers and training providers to support apprenticeship recruitment, training and completion. Its role therefore reflects the structure of the Welsh system and the responsibilities of the Welsh Government and Medr.

While the way this support is delivered differs between the three nations, the underlying purpose is the same: to help construction employers overcome the practical barriers to recruiting, supporting and retaining apprentices, and to improve the flow of new entrants into the industry.



CITB's investment and direct delivery

£188m+

Apprenticeship training grants paid to employers between 2001 and 2025

78,000+

Apprentices supported across Great Britain during the period

£85.4m

CITB investment in Apprenticeship Grants and Travel to Train support in 2026-27

£77.2m

Apprenticeship Grants in 2026-27

£8.2m

Travel to Train support in 2026-27

£23.1m

Planned CITB investment in directly delivered apprenticeships in 2028-29, up from £20.1m in 2025-26

CITB also directly delivers apprenticeships where market provision alone is insufficient, including specialist occupations through the National Construction College (NCC) and apprenticeship delivery in Scotland through its Skills Development Scotland contract. In Scotland, this gives CITB a more direct role in apprenticeship delivery than in England and Wales, reflecting the different funding and delivery arrangements in the devolved system.

Taken together, these activities mean that CITB's role extends beyond funding apprenticeships. It supports employers to create and sustain apprenticeship opportunities, helps apprentices and employers navigate the system, and directly delivers training where provision is limited. This gives CITB a role in addressing both sides of the industry's apprenticeship challenge: increasing the number of opportunities available and helping more apprentices successfully complete their training.

Appendix

Figure 1 Construction apprenticeship starts and achievements by nation

Construction Planning & Built Environment – England	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25
Apprenticeship Starts	21,210	22,680	22,550	22,000	20,210	26,470	24,470	24,340	24,470
Apprenticeship Achievements	11,980	12,420	11,030	9,510	8,730	7,550	8,460	12,880	12,980

Source: Department for Education (England), Apprenticeships explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/apprenticeships

Data period is an academic year, i.e. August to July

Construction & Related – Scotland	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25	2025/26
Apprenticeship Starts	5,934	6,104	6,111	6,417	5,033	6,540	6,623	6,410	6,526	6,745
Apprenticeship Achievements	3,557	4,000	4,195	4,977	4,158	4,436	4,612	5,110	5,174	5,630

Source: Skills Development Scotland, Modern Apprenticeship Statistics skillsdevelopmentscotland.co.uk/publications-statistics/statistics/modern-apprenticeships?page=1&statisticCategoryId=4&order=date-desc

Data period is a financial year, i.e. April to March

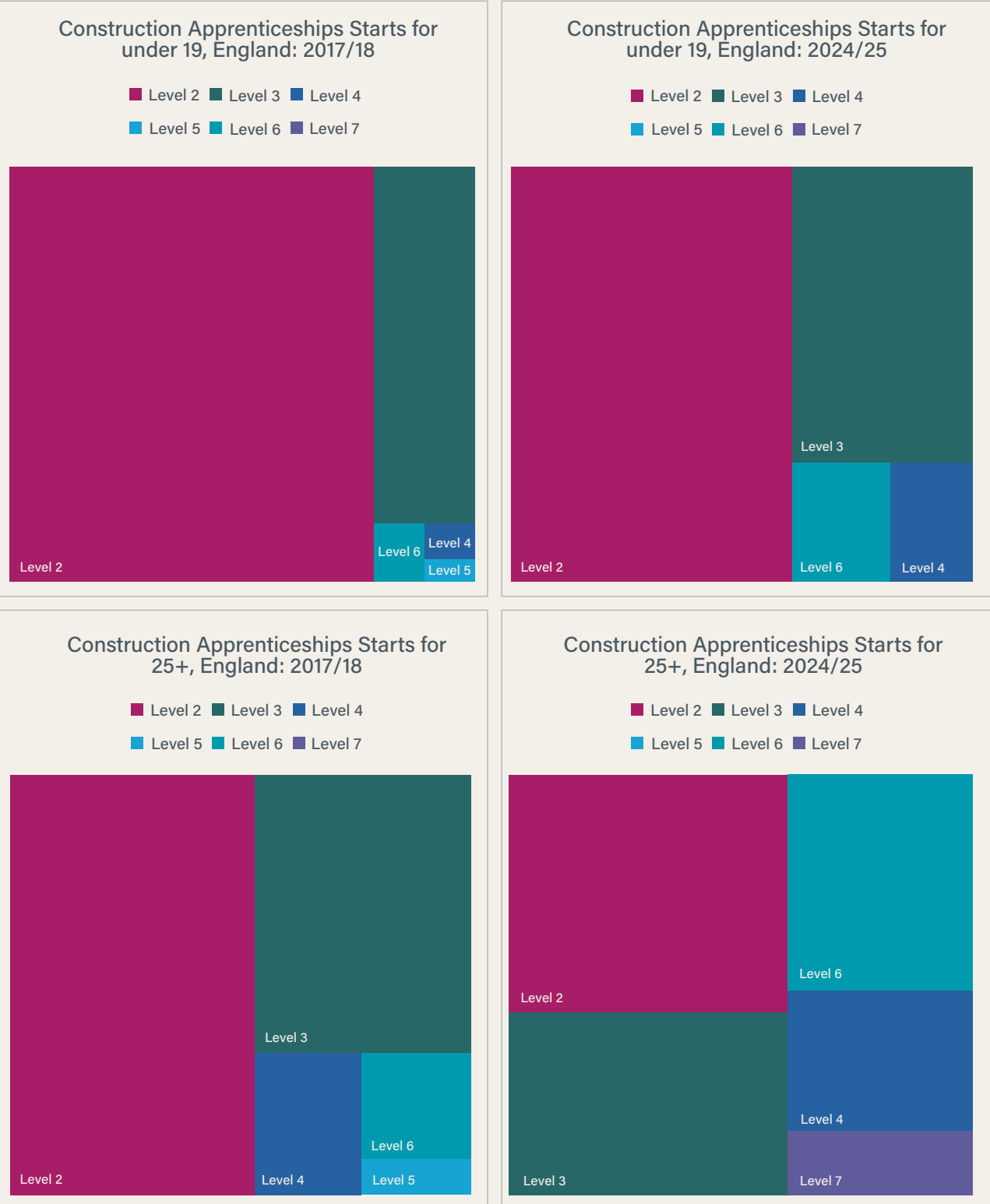
Construction, Planning and the Built Environment – Wales	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25
Apprenticeship Starts	2,410	2,440	2,595	2,120	2,265	2,760	2,255	2,295	1,745
Apprenticeship Achievements	1,480	1,410	1,530	^	^	1,565	1,615	1,085	915

Source: Welsh Government, StatsWales - [Apprenticeships stats.gov.wales/en-GB/topic/14/apprenticeships](https://apprenticeships.stats.gov.wales/en-GB/topic/14/apprenticeships)

Data period is an academic year, i.e. August to July

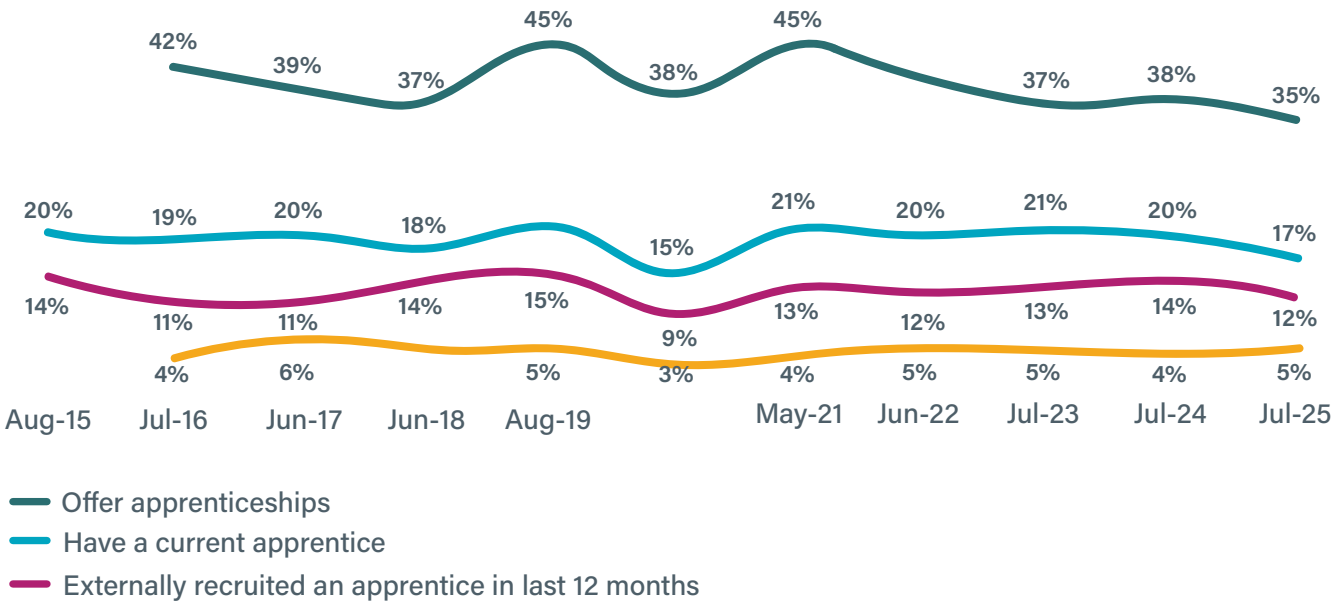
^ The standard performance measures were not produced in academic years 2019/20 and 2020/21 due to the disruption of the pandemic.

Figure 2 Apprenticeship starts for Construction, Planning and the Built Environment by age and level 2017-18 and 2024/25



Source: Department for Education (England), Apprenticeships explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/apprenticeships

Figure 3 Construction apprenticeships: usage over time



Source: CITB Employer Panel Employer: Attitudes and Motivations regarding Learning and Training (September 2025)

Figure 4 Likelihood of employers starting people on apprenticeships in the next 12 months

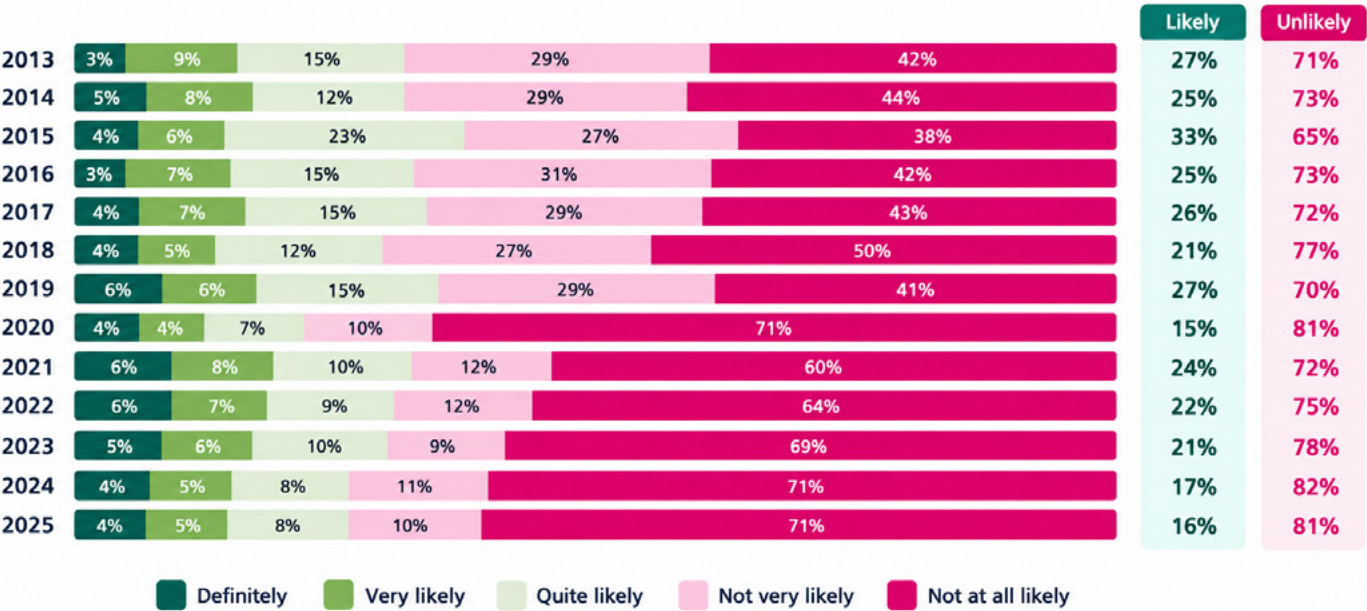
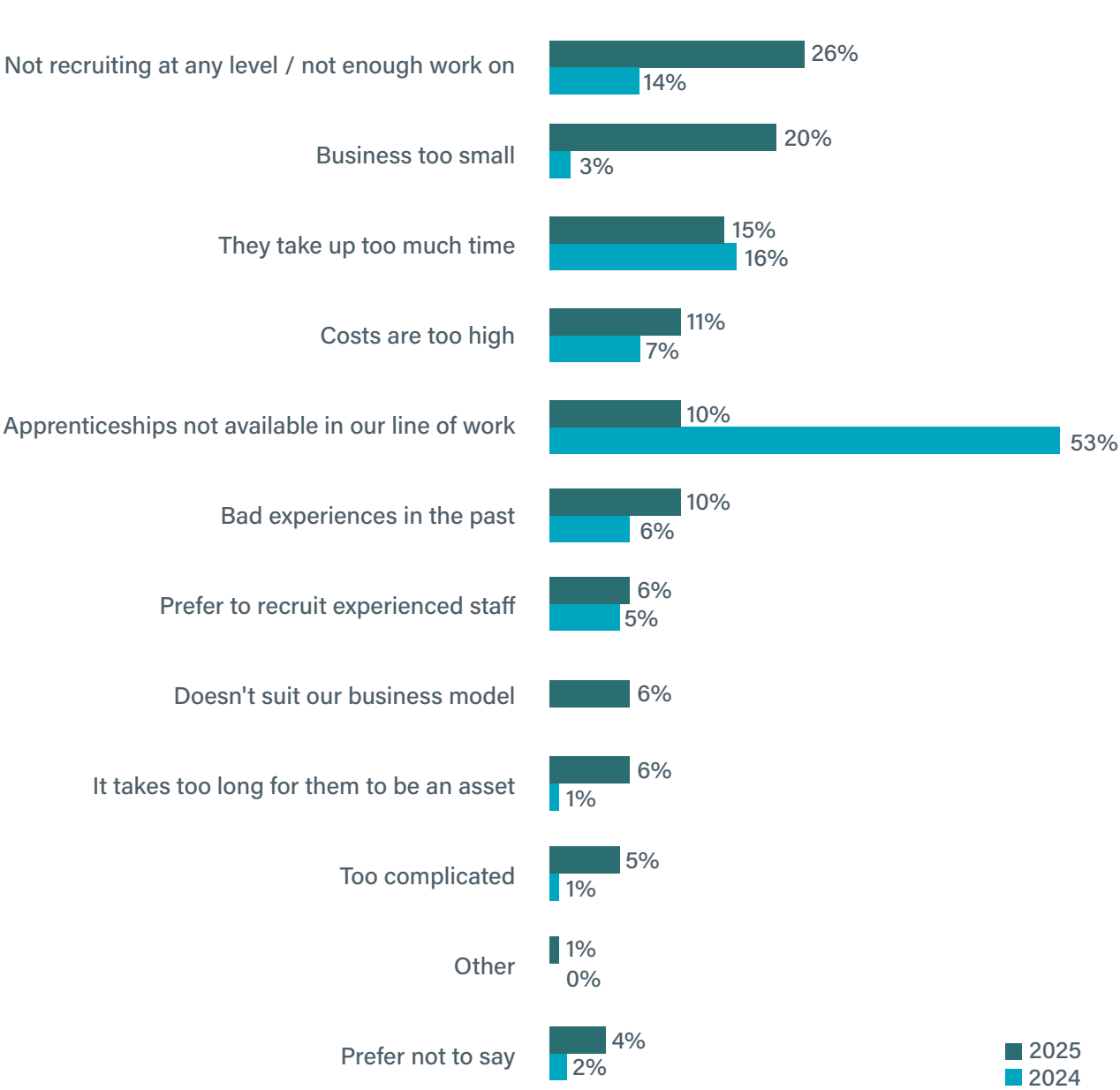


Figure 5 Larger employers are much more likely to employ an apprentice than smaller firms
Percentage of Construction firms employing apprentices, by size

Year	All	2-4 employees	5-9 employees	10-24 employees	25-99 employees	100+ employees
	%	%	%	%	%	%
2025	17	9	25	39	57	84
2024	20	14	24	39	50	85
2023	21	15	24	42	56	81
2022	20	15	23	37	56	81
2021	21	16	27	36	52	73
2020	15	9	19	31	46	82
2019	21	16	25	33	54	74
2018	18	11	24	39	54	79
2017	20	12	27	43	49	76
2016	19	12	27	42	53	67
2015	19	11	33	43	56	85

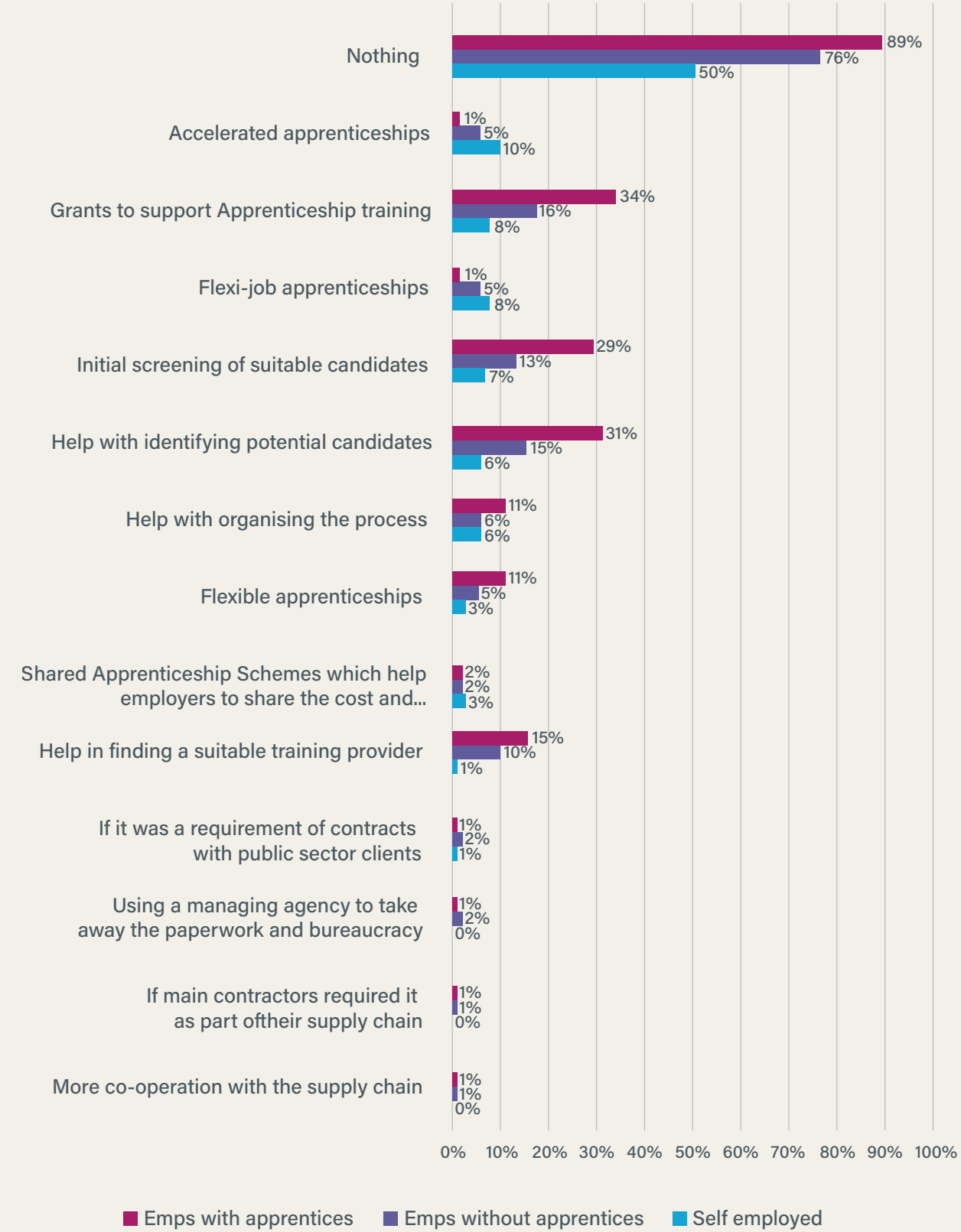
Source: CITB Employer Panel Employer: Attitudes and Motivations regarding Learning and Training (September 2025)

Figure 6 Barriers to offering apprenticeships for those who do not offer them



Source: CITB Employer Panel Employer: Attitudes and Motivations regarding Learning and Training (September 2025)

Figure 7 Ways in which construction businesses could be encouraged to take on (more) apprenticeships



Source: CITB Skills and Training in the Construction Industry 2023 (September 2024)

Figure 8 Achievement rate for Construction, Planning and the Built Environment by deprivation level and age, England 2020/21 – 2024/25

	2020/21			2021/22			2022/23			2023/24			2024/25		
	16-18	19-23	24+	16-18	19-23	24+	16-18	19-23	24+	16-18	19-23	24	16-18	19-23	24
One (most deprived)	52.5%	58.7%	53.8%	45.8%	49.6%	45.9%	51.4%	52.0%	47.5%	55.5%	58.7%	54.7%	60.7%	63.1%	62.1%
Two	53.5%	60.6%	55.0%	50.8%	55.7%	48.1%	53.6%	55.7%	49.3%	58.9%	60.4%	56.9%	62.9%	65.3%	63.7%
Three	56.2%	66.0%	57.3%	54.0%	60.2%	53.1%	57.2%	60.1%	52.4%	61.4%	65.1%	59.7%	64.1%	68.0%	65.1%
Four	58.5%	67.5%	60.6%	55.5%	59.7%	51.6%	59.0%	63.1%	54.9%	62.4%	66.4%	61.2%	66.8%	69.7%	67.0%
Five (least deprived)	59.4%	66.0%	55.0%	56.2%	58.9%	56.2%	59.7%	62.5%	55.2%	63.9%	66.7%	62.3%	66.8%	69.6%	67.3%

Source: Department for Education (England), Apprenticeships explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/apprenticeships

Figure 9 Apprenticeship starts for Construction, Planning and the Built Environment by ethnicity, England 2018/19 and 2024/25

	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25
Ethnic minorities (excluding white minorities)	1,450	1,240	1,760	1,930	2,020	2,390
White	20,350	18,550	24,340	22,100	22,030	21,810

Source: Department for Education (England), Apprenticeships explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/apprenticeships

Figure 10 Apprenticeship achievements for Construction, Planning and the Built Environment by ethnicity, England 2018/19 and 2024/25

	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25
Ethnic minorities (excluding white minorities)	390	400	380	360	670	840
White	9,080	8,280	7,130	8,000	12,040	12,040

Figure 11 Apprenticeship starts for Construction, Planning and the Built Environment by region, England from 2018/19 to 2024/25

	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25
North West	3,570	4,370	3,800	3,910	3,930
Yorkshire and The Humber	2,780	3,540	2,980	2,820	2,840
South West	2,850	3,780	3,390	3,300	3,310
South East	2,750	3,530	3,410	3,620	3,410
West Midlands	1,920	2,230	2,140	2,190	2,240
North East	1,470	2,040	1,920	1,900	1,920
East Midlands	1,710	2,340	2,240	1,930	2,090
London	1,320	1,890	1,910	2,010	2,070
East of England	1,710	2,550	2,400	2,410	2,410

Source: Department for Education (England), Apprenticeships explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/apprenticeships

Note: Excludes starts outside of England and unknown

Figure 12 Number of businesses in Construction, 2025

	North East	North West	Yorkshire and the Humber	East Midlands	West Midlands	East of England	London	South East	South West	Wales	Scotland
Micro (0-9)	9,685	32,735	24,780	24,960	27,305	45,900	60,285	60,535	33,760	13,675	20,790
Small (10-49)	700	1,850	1,485	1,275	1,355	1,860	1,835	2,480	1,720	810	1,640
Medium (50-249)	95	260	170	135	135	220	215	260	165	90	250
Large (250+)	10	35	30	25	20	40	40	40	20	0	35
	10,490	34,880	26,465	26,395	28,815	48,020	62,375	63,315	35,665	14,575	22,715

Source: Department for Business and Trade, Business population estimates for the UK and regions 2025: statistical release (Published 2 October 2025) <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/business-population-estimates-2025>

Apprenticeship policy timeline

- 2004 – Advanced Modern Apprenticeships and Foundation Modern Apprenticeships were rebranded to Apprenticeships. Age limit of 25 removed.
- 2004 – Scotland retains the term “Modern Apprenticeships,” marking a divergence from England and Wales, which rebranded provision simply as Apprenticeships.
- 2009 – Apprenticeships, Skills, Children and Learning Act placed apprenticeships on a statutory footing for the first time in England, giving young people a right to an apprenticeship place.
- 2010 – Higher Apprenticeships introduced, extending apprenticeships into higher-level qualifications at Level 4 and above.
- 2012 – Apprenticeship Grant for Employers of 16-24-year-olds introduced.
- 2013 – Richard Review of Apprenticeships published recommendations to simplify and improve apprenticeships, leading to the development of employer-led “standards” (later delivered via Trailblazers).
- 2014 – First Trailblazer standards launched. Employer-designed apprenticeship standards piloted, marking the start of the transition away from frameworks.
- 2015 – Degree apprenticeships introduced, combining paid employment and work-based training with university-level study leading to a full bachelor’s or master’s degree Their introduction marked a significant expansion of apprenticeships into higher-level and professional occupations.
- 2015 – UK Government announced apprenticeship system reform plans and set a target of 3 million apprenticeship starts in England by 2020.
- 2016 – Apprenticeship Levy legislation introduced via the Finance Act 2016, setting the groundwork for the 2017 launch.
- 2017 – The Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education (IfATE) established to help shape technical education and apprenticeships in the UK.
- 2017 – Apprenticeship Levy began. Large employers must pay 0.5% of their pay bill if this is over £3m.
- 2017 – Employer-designed standards rolled out nationally. Trailblazer approach embedded as the new system, with frameworks beginning to be phased out (fully withdrawn in 2020).
- 2017 – Apprenticeship National Insurance Contributions exemption introduced to encourage more businesses to take on apprentices.
- 2017 – 12-month minimum length of apprenticeship introduced, must include off-the-job training, usually in colleges.
- 2017 – Introduction of the End-Point Assessment in England.
- 2019 – Employers who pay the levy, can transfer up to 25% of their training budget to a smaller company within their supply chain.
- 2019 – T Levels introduced (first teaching in 2020). While not apprenticeships, these formed part of the wider technical education reform agenda alongside apprenticeships.
- 2020 – New apprenticeship starts in England moved entirely to employer-designed apprenticeship standards. Existing apprentices on legacy frameworks were permitted to complete their programmes until 31 March 2025.
- 2020 – Covid-19 apprenticeship support schemes introduced, including employer incentive payments and delivery flexibilities to sustain apprenticeship starts during the pandemic.
- 2021 – Digital Apprenticeship Service expanded beyond levy-paying employers, enabling more employers to reserve and manage apprenticeship funding online.
- 2022 – Digital Apprenticeship Service became mandatory for all employers.
- 2023 – “Get Britain Working” Plan announced. Apprenticeships highlighted as part of the strategy to reduce economic inactivity and support workforce participation.
- 2023 – Maximum limit of 10 apprenticeship starts removed for small employers who do not pay the Apprenticeship Levy.
- April 2024 – Government begins fully funding apprenticeships for SMEs for apprentices aged up to 21 years.

- 2024 – Unused Apprenticeship Levy funds become unavailable to the original levy-paying employer after expiry and are redistributed to support apprenticeship training with other employers.
- 2024 – Apprenticeship funding continues to shift towards higher-level provision, with around 40% of levy funding supporting Level 4 and above apprenticeships. This has contributed to declining numbers of young entrants (particularly 16–17-year-olds) and fewer starts at Levels 2 and 3.
- 2024 – Government announces that Skills England will take over the functions of IfATE.
- 2024 – Government announces its intention to replace the Apprenticeship Levy with a new Growth and Skills Levy, allowing levy funding to support a broader range of training alongside apprenticeships, although implementation dates are yet to be confirmed.
- 2024 – Wales establishes the Commission for Tertiary Education and Research (Medr), bringing responsibility for post-16 education, training and skills into a single body.
- 2025 – Government launches the first seven Foundation Apprenticeships, including three in construction, providing new entry-level work-based routes for young people aged 16–21 into sectors experiencing skills shortages.
- 2025 – The final apprenticeship frameworks close in England on 31 March 2025, completing the transition to employer-designed apprenticeship standards.
- 2025 – English and maths exit requirements are relaxed for adult apprentices in England. Apprentices aged 19 and over no longer need to achieve Level 2 English and maths to complete their apprenticeship, although providers must continue to assess learning needs.
- 2025 – Government announces that public funding for Level 7 (postgraduate) apprenticeships will be restricted to apprentices aged 16–21 from January 2026.
- 2025 – Scotland passes Stage 1 of the Tertiary Education and Training (Funding and Governance) Bill, transferring responsibility for apprenticeships from Skills Development Scotland to the Scottish Funding Council.
- 2025 – Skills England is formally established as an executive agency, taking responsibility for identifying national skills priorities ahead of the transfer of statutory functions from IfATE.
- 2025 – Government commits to creating 50,000 additional apprenticeships and Foundation Apprenticeships over the next three years through a £725 million skills reform package focused on increasing opportunities for young people.
- January 2026 – Public funding for most Level 7 apprenticeships becomes restricted to apprentices aged 16–21, reflecting the Government’s priority to focus investment on younger learners and entry routes into skilled employment.
- March 2026 – Government announces a £1 billion Youth Employment Drive with the ambition of creating up to 200,000 new jobs and apprenticeships for young people, alongside the biggest package of apprenticeship reforms in over a decade.
- April 2026 – The Growth and Skills Levy replaces the Apprenticeship Levy, introducing greater flexibility over how levy funding can be used while retaining a focus on priority skills and employer demand.
- June 2026 – Skills England assumes the statutory functions of IfATE, subject to the passage and commencement of legislation.
- August 2026 – Government doubles the skills weighting in major public procurement competitions, increasing the emphasis on apprenticeships, work placements and workforce development within social value criteria. The change is intended to encourage greater employer investment in skills and training through public sector contracts.
- August 2026 – Eligible SMEs become able to access 100% government funding for apprenticeship training costs for apprentices aged under 25, removing employer co-investment and reducing one of the principal financial barriers to recruiting young apprentices.
- September 2026 – Government begins withdrawing funding from a number of lower-priority apprenticeship standards as part of the Growth and Skills Levy reforms, concentrating investment on sectors and occupations facing the greatest skills shortages.

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For information on how
CITB can support employers
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