

Q2. Set out your initial view on the performance of Skills England and its policy development process (Approx. 250 words)

CIOB welcomes the creation of Skills England and supports the ambition to develop a stronger national approach to skills planning that better connects employers, education providers and Government. A more strategic approach to identifying workforce needs is essential if the UK is to deliver its Industrial Strategy ambitions.

However, CIOB believes careful consideration will be needed regarding Skills England's role and position within Government. While the Department for Work and Pensions is well placed to understand labour market participation, support people into employment and identify immediate workforce shortages, there is a risk that skills policy becomes primarily focused on addressing current vacancies rather than developing the workforce needed for future economic growth.

Addressing current shortages is important, but long-term workforce planning must begin much earlier. Skills England should play a stronger role in connecting pre-16 education with post-16 technical pathways, helping to improve awareness of vocational careers and ensuring young people understand the breadth of opportunities available across sectors such as construction.

Construction continues to face an ageing workforce and significant skills shortages, as 35% of the current workforce is now aged over 50, creating significant replacement demand over the coming decade. CITB forecasts indicate that the sector will approximately 206,000 additional workers by 2030 to meet demand (or 41,200 extra workers per year), reinforcing the need for a skills system focused on both immediate shortages and long-term workforce development. Meeting future demand will require not only training more people, but inspiring more young people to consider technical careers in the first place. Skills England should therefore look beyond where shortages exist today and consider how Government can build sustainable talent pipelines for the next decade.

To achieve this, CIOB believes Skills England should continue to strengthen engagement with employers, professional bodies and education providers, while ensuring that workforce planning is informed by both current labour market intelligence and long-term economic priorities.

Q3. How important are apprenticeships to delivery and innovation within the Government's Industrial Strategy?

Score: 10/10

Q4. How closely do the current Apprenticeship Standards reflect the specific technical requirements of the eight priority sectors identified in the Industrial Strategy? How responsive is Skills England to skills needs in these sectors?

Current Apprenticeship Standards generally provide a strong foundation and have benefited from greater employer involvement than previous frameworks. In construction, many standards successfully reflect the practical skills, knowledge and behaviours (SKBs) required by employers.

However, the pace at which standards are reviewed and updated does not always keep pace with technological change or emerging industry priorities. The construction sector is evolving rapidly through increased adoption of digital technologies, modern methods of construction, retrofit, sustainability requirements and the implementation of the Building Safety Act. Apprenticeship Standards must remain sufficiently agile to ensure apprentices are developing the SKBs employers will require over the coming decade rather than those needed when the standards were first developed.

CIOB welcomes Skills England's ambition to strengthen strategic workforce planning, but believes greater engagement with employers, professional bodies and sector representatives will be essential if standards are to remain responsive. The Industrial Strategy identifies priority growth sectors that will experience significant technological and regulatory change, and construction will play a critical enabling role in delivering many of these ambitions, including housing, infrastructure, retrofit and net zero.

Skills England should adopt a proactive approach, using workforce forecasting alongside employer engagement to identify future skills needs before shortages emerge. This will ensure Apprenticeship Standards continue to support innovation, productivity and economic growth rather than simply responding to existing labour market pressures.

Q5. How can Local Skills Improvement Plans (LSIPs) be better integrated with national Industrial Strategy goals to prevent regional skills disparities?

Local Skills Improvement Plans play an important role in ensuring training reflects the needs of local employers and economies. However, they should not operate in isolation from national workforce priorities.

Construction illustrates this challenge clearly. While labour markets vary across regions, the need to deliver housing, infrastructure, retrofit and building safety improvements is a national priority. Many construction employers also operate across multiple regions, meaning workforce demand often extends beyond local authority boundaries. This means that a purely local approach risks overlooking wider workforce movements and the needs of industries where skills shortages are not confined to a single geography.

Government should establish stronger coordination between Skills England and Local Skills Improvement Plans to ensure local priorities contribute towards the wider objectives of the Industrial Strategy. This should include consistent labour market

forecasting, better sharing of workforce intelligence and greater collaboration between neighbouring regions where skills shortages are similar.

Professional bodies and employers should also have a stronger role in the development of Local Skills Improvement Plans to ensure they reflect both current recruitment challenges and future workforce needs. Finally, greater transparency around how local priorities are determined would help employers and providers better understand how investment decisions support both regional growth and national economic ambitions.

Q6. To what extent will levy reform alleviate friction in the apprenticeships system?

Score: 6/10

Q7. What is your view of the Growth and Skills Levy and, if it should be improved, how?

CIOB welcomes the Government's ambition to make the skills system more flexible and to provide greater support for employers. Measures such as fully funding apprenticeships for under-25s in SMEs and introducing additional financial incentives are positive steps that recognise the important role smaller businesses play in developing the future workforce.

However, we have concerns that elements of the Growth and Skills Levy risk adding unnecessary complexity rather than addressing existing gaps in the skills system.

The introduction of apprenticeship units, allowing employers to use up to 50% of their levy funds on shorter training, has the potential to provide greater flexibility within the skills system. This could be particularly valuable in sectors such as construction, where fragmented employment patterns, project-based work and a high proportion of SMEs can make traditional apprenticeship models more challenging to deliver. It is worth noting that CIOB is also an apprenticeship provider. Our own apprenticeships have also been designed to give learners and employers greater flexibility to schedule learning units around to suit business requirements and align their learning to workplace activities.

However, CIOB believes the balance between flexibility and investment in full apprenticeships will be important. While apprenticeship units may provide valuable opportunities for upskilling and targeted training, there is currently limited evidence on how employers will value these units in practice and what progression or labour market outcomes they will deliver. Given the Government's ambition to increase participation in technical pathways and attract more young people into skilled careers, care must be taken to ensure that a significant proportion of levy funding is not diverted away from full apprenticeship programmes that provide new entrants with the comprehensive training and experience required to enter the workforce.

The reforms should also recognise that financial support alone will not remove barriers for SMEs. While increased funding is welcome, many smaller employers continue to face challenges relating to administrative capacity, access to clear information, limited internal resources, time constraints and difficulties attracting applicants to apprenticeship vacancies. Additionally, 'poaching' is incredibly prevalent in the construction sector. This is the practice of recruiting from 'rival' companies with the offer of better pay conditions, perks to address skills gaps. This practice often deters smaller employers from spending resources on apprenticeships and training. Addressing these practical barriers is likely to have a greater impact on apprenticeship participation than funding changes alone.

Overall, the reforms represent positive progress, but the levy should become a genuinely flexible skills fund that complements, rather than duplicates, existing training provision while continuing to protect investment in high-quality apprenticeships.

Q8. Which sectors stand to benefit most from apprenticeship units?

Apprenticeship units have the potential to benefit sectors with fragmented labour markets, rapidly evolving skills needs and a high proportion of SMEs. Construction is one such sector, but the benefits will depend on how the reforms are implemented.

Around 99% of construction businesses are SMEs, many employing fewer than ten people. These businesses often lack the workload, financial capacity or administrative resource to employ an apprentice continuously for two or three years. A unit-based approach could allow apprentices to progress across multiple employers, enabling smaller firms to contribute to training without carrying responsibility for the entire apprenticeship. This could be particularly valuable in construction, where employment patterns are often linked to project pipelines rather than continuous employment with a single organisation. It could also ensure that learners who leave an apprenticeship due to redundancy or personal circumstances receive formal recognition for completed learning rather than having to restart from the beginning.

Units could also support existing workers to develop specialist skills in areas such as retrofit, digital construction, fire safety, sustainability and modern methods of construction without undertaking a full apprenticeship.

However, Government should ensure apprenticeship units complement rather than duplicate existing provision. Construction already has a complex skills landscape, including apprenticeships, Skills Bootcamps, T Levels, V Levels, Foundation Apprenticeships, NVQs, CSCS cards and CITB grant schemes. Introducing another training route without clear integration risks making the system more difficult for employers to navigate.

Apprenticeship units are therefore most likely to benefit sectors where they are used to widen participation, support lifelong learning and provide greater flexibility, while remaining firmly connected to recognised occupational standards and progression towards full competence.

Q9. Will the current 12-month expiry window for levy funds facilitate or hinder workforce planning across IS-8 sectors?

Score: 4/10

Q10. How can the relationship between HM Treasury and the Department for Work and Pensions/Department for Education be improved to deliver a sustainable budget for skills in England?

Delivering the Industrial Strategy will require skills policy to be viewed as a long-term investment rather than a short-term spending commitment. Too often, decisions relating to education, employment and workforce development are made independently, despite relying on one another to achieve Government's wider economic ambitions.

HM Treasury, the Department for Education, the Department for Work and Pensions, Skills England and departments responsible for delivering housing, infrastructure, industrial policy and net zero objectives should work within a shared long-term workforce strategy. This would provide greater certainty for employers, training providers and learners while ensuring that investment reflects future labour market demand rather than responding solely to immediate pressures.

Multi-year funding settlements would improve workforce planning, allowing employers and providers to invest confidently in apprenticeships, training capacity and specialist facilities. Funding decisions should also be informed by robust labour market forecasting and regularly reviewed against Industrial Strategy priorities.

Finally, Government should present the skills budget through a more joined-up narrative. Employers should not need to navigate multiple funding streams, departments and programmes to understand what support is available. A simpler and more coordinated system would improve participation while making better use of public investment.

Q11. How can the Government's funding mechanism for the skills budget be better devised and communicated to employers and training providers?

The current skills funding landscape can be difficult for employers and training providers to navigate, with multiple programmes, funding rules and eligibility criteria operating alongside one another. While individual initiatives often have merit, the overall system can appear fragmented and overly complex.

Government should simplify the way skills funding is presented by providing a single, clearly communicated framework that explains the different routes available to employers, learners and providers. This should include straightforward guidance on apprenticeships, apprenticeship units and other technical qualifications, helping employers understand which option is most appropriate for their workforce needs.

For SMEs in particular, communication should extend beyond publishing guidance online. Many smaller employers lack dedicated HR or training teams and require practical support to understand available funding, identify suitable providers and navigate the application process. This is particularly important for SMEs, which make up the vast majority of construction businesses and often lack dedicated training functions.

Funding arrangements should also provide greater certainty through longer-term commitments, enabling providers to invest in facilities and staffing while giving employers confidence to develop workforce plans over several years. Simplicity, consistency and stability are likely to increase participation more effectively than introducing additional funding schemes without improving communication.

Q12. To what extent do you see apprenticeship units as meeting the upskilling needs of innovative sectors compared to full apprenticeship programmes?

CIOB believes apprenticeship units have the potential to strengthen the skills system, particularly in sectors such as construction where employment patterns are often more fragmented than in other industries. They could make it easier for SMEs to participate in training by allowing learners to move between employers while continuing to build towards an apprenticeship, reducing the burden on individual businesses while increasing opportunities for learners.

Apprenticeship units could also provide significant value in supporting continuing professional development and targeted upskilling. Existing workers could gain competence in emerging and priority areas such as retrofit, digital construction, fire safety, sustainability and modern methods of construction without undertaking a full apprenticeship. They may also help adults and career changers enter the sector more flexibly, support pre-apprenticeship preparation and enable learners whose apprenticeships have been interrupted to continue their training without losing previously completed learning.

However, apprenticeship units should complement rather than replace full apprenticeships. Construction is a safety-critical industry where workers must achieve full occupational competence before carrying out many roles independently. Employers need confidence that a completed apprenticeship represents a nationally recognised standard of knowledge, practical competence and professional behaviour. If apprenticeship units become viewed as an alternative endpoint rather than a stepping

stone towards occupational competence, there is a risk that employers will be uncertain about what an individual is qualified to do.

The success of apprenticeship units will therefore depend on robust implementation. Units should clearly map to occupational standards, be nationally consistent and transferable between employers and providers, and include rigorous quality assurance. Funding should encourage progression towards full apprenticeships where appropriate, and there should be a simple mechanism for learners to transfer between employers without losing progress. If implemented in this way, apprenticeship units could provide valuable flexibility while preserving the integrity and quality of the apprenticeship system.

Q13. Please set out your view on the Government's reform of End-Point Assessment.

CIOB supports reforms that improve flexibility and reduce unnecessary bureaucracy, provided they do not compromise the quality, consistency or credibility of apprenticeships. At present, there is limited clarity around how the proposed End-Point Assessment reforms will operate in practice, including when apprentices should be assessed, what progression milestones will exist and how quality assurance will be maintained throughout the apprenticeship journey.

This is particularly important given existing challenges around apprenticeship completion. Any reforms should strengthen confidence in the apprenticeship system rather than introduce additional uncertainty.

CIOB's principal concern is not whether assessment takes place earlier or later in an apprenticeship, but whether assessment remains robust, independent and consistent across employers and training providers. Under the proposed reforms, employers may take on greater responsibility for assessing behaviours. While employers are well placed to evaluate day-to-day performance, there is a risk that increased employer involvement could lead to greater variation in assessment standards and reduce the consistency that independent assessment provides.

This is especially significant in construction, where behaviours such as professionalism, safety culture, ethical decision-making and personal responsibility are fundamental to competent practice. This is also particularly relevant given the evolving Building Safety regime and plans for enhanced checks and balances on those working in the building professions, trades and occupations in England. Many construction roles involve practical competence that develops over time through supervised experience, meaning assessment approaches must recognise the importance of workplace learning alongside technical knowledge. Government should therefore ensure that reforms retain rigorous, independent quality assurance while giving employers greater flexibility in how apprentices demonstrate competence.

Q14. How can SMEs be incentivised to take on apprentices?

SMEs play a critical role in training the future construction workforce, yet many continue to face barriers that extend beyond the direct cost of employing an apprentice. While the Government's decision to fully fund apprenticeships for under-25s and introduce additional financial incentives is welcome, funding alone is unlikely to increase participation significantly.

Many SMEs lack the internal capacity to recruit, supervise and administer apprenticeship programmes. Time constraints, limited HR resources, uncertainty around funding rules and difficulties identifying suitable candidates can all discourage employers from taking on apprentices.

Government should therefore complement financial support with practical assistance. This could include simplified administrative processes, clearer guidance, local brokerage services that connect employers with providers and learners, shared apprenticeship models, including approaches that allow learners to gain experience across multiple employers where appropriate, and mentoring support for smaller businesses during the early stages of employing an apprentice.

Improving careers education would also help SMEs by increasing awareness of apprenticeship opportunities and generating a stronger pipeline of applicants. Incentivising SMEs should therefore focus on reducing administrative burden, improving access to information and making it easier to recruit suitable candidates, rather than relying solely on additional funding.

Q15. How can schools' careers advice be improved to promote the apprenticeships pathway?

Careers education should begin earlier and present apprenticeships as a high-quality route into professional careers rather than as an alternative for those who do not pursue higher education. Too many young people continue to have a limited understanding of the breadth of careers available within sectors such as construction, while teachers and parents may also lack awareness of the opportunities technical pathways can provide.

CIOB's Attitudes Towards Construction Careers research highlights the need for a more modern and comprehensive approach to careers guidance. Our 2026 research found that 45% of young people said construction was not covered during careers advice at school, demonstrating that many pupils are leaving education without being exposed to one of the UK's largest and most strategically important sectors. Only 38% were aware of Construction T Levels, while awareness of Skills Bootcamps, Homebuilding Skills Hubs and Technical Excellence Colleges was significantly lower. The issue is not

necessarily a lack of programmes, but ensuring young people, parents and teachers understand the opportunities available.

Government should strengthen employer engagement within schools by increasing meaningful encounters with industry through site visits, workplace experiences, careers events and engagement with professional bodies. Young people are more likely to consider careers they can see and understand.

Careers advice should also reflect the changing ways in which young people access information. CIOB's research found that social media is now the second largest influence on young people's career choices, behind only family. The proportion of young people citing social media as influencing their career decisions has increased from 26% in 2025 to 32% in 2026. Schools, employers and Government should therefore work together to ensure that accurate, engaging and positive information about apprenticeships and technical careers is available across the digital platforms where young people are already seeking careers advice.

Finally, schools should be encouraged to present vocational and academic pathways on an equal footing. Apprenticeships, T Levels and other technical routes should be promoted as respected pathways leading to skilled, rewarding and long-term careers rather than as second-choice options.

Q16. To what extent are local authorities and other devolved government structures responsible for the success of the apprenticeships system?

Score: 7/10

Q17. If you had one policy recommendation for Government, what would it be?

Government should develop a long-term, cross-government Built Environment Skills Strategy that aligns education, employment and industrial policy around a single objective: building a sustainable workforce capable of delivering the UK's economic ambitions.

While recent reforms represent positive progress, skills policy remains spread across multiple departments and programmes. Decisions relating to education, employment, housing, infrastructure and industrial growth are often developed separately, despite being fundamentally interconnected. A more joined-up approach would provide greater certainty for employers, education providers and learners while ensuring that investment in skills supports the delivery of national priorities.

The strategy should be jointly owned by Skills England, the Department for Education, the Department for Work and Pensions, HM Treasury and departments responsible for housing and industrial policy. It should be informed by long-term workforce forecasting, developed in partnership with employers and professional bodies, and supported by multi-year funding settlements.

Importantly, the strategy should consider the entire workforce pipeline, from inspiring young people to pursue technical careers, through high-quality apprenticeships and training, to supporting progression into sustained employment. Increasing apprenticeship starts alone will not address workforce shortages if newly qualified individuals cannot secure long-term careers within the sectors they have trained to join.

A coordinated, long-term built environment workforce strategy would provide a stronger foundation for productivity, economic growth and successful delivery of the Industrial Strategy.