



Department
for Work &
Pensions

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Secretary of State for Work &
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Dear colleagues,

Today, the government has published the latest data on apprenticeship achievements, showing yet another year-on-year increase and I wanted to thank you for your commitment and focus during a period of significant reform.

The apprenticeship qualification achievement rate (QAR) has increased by 4.9 percentage points, now standing at 65.4% for the 2024/25 academic year, compared to 60.5% the previous year. This is another good result which speaks to the hard work of providers and employers alike. Total achievement volumes are also up by 11.3% at 198,330, more than 20,000 on the previous year.¹ Skills provide a clear route to opportunity and as outlined in the government's Further Education outcomes publication, 94% of apprentices that achieve their apprenticeships remain in sustained employment.²

It is our collective focus on excellence that has brought us success, but we understand that quality is wider than achievements - it is also about learner experience, good delivery, and long-term value to the country. While many apprentices move on for positive reasons, the greatest value for the individual, the employer, and the economy comes from full completion. To maximise the impact of this investment and building on the strong foundations providers and employers have helped to create, I would like to see achievement rates reach and exceed 70% in the coming years.

We are now building a system that is more flexible and fundamentally aligned with the future of the British economy. We must train the skilled workforce of the future and refocus on early-career pathways, entry-level opportunities, and tackling youth unemployment. Our new flexibilities and products through the Growth and Skills Offer are building on the strong quality base, not compromising it. By retaining the core strength of an apprenticeship standard that it is employer-led, and consists of the knowledge, skills and behaviours (KSBs) for occupational competence, we maintain the gold standard rigour that employers expect.

The new offer is a great step forward because it moves away from the rigid, one-size-fits-all apprenticeship model toward a system built for agility, flexibility, and real-world impact. Whether it is the launch of foundation apprenticeships to support young people or the introduction of targeted shorter duration apprenticeships, these are designed to be rigorous

¹ [Apprenticeships, Academic year 2024/25 - Explore education statistics - GOV.UK](#)

² [Further education outcomes, Academic year 2022/23 - Explore education statistics - GOV.UK](#)

and responsive to bridging skills gaps while providing a guaranteed pathway to career success. Apprenticeship units allow businesses to rapidly upskill staff in critical areas without committing to a full, multi-year apprenticeship. The workforce of the future doesn't just need long-term qualifications - it needs just-in-time skills.

As we introduce new products, we will monitor their quality and won't hesitate to intervene where it is at risk. Our system is driven by this commitment to quality, and I would like to highlight recent progress.

1) Quality

- By the end of September 2025, Ofsted had inspected all apprenticeship providers to ensure they had all received a recent Ofsted inspection. **93% of apprentices were in good or outstanding provision at the end of the 2024/25 academic year up from 90% last year.**³ The recent changes to the Ofsted inspection framework should support further progress as the new, more detailed, report card will give a more transparent and detailed appraisal of training provider performance and how it must improve.
- In January 2026, the apprenticeship accountability framework (AAF) incorporated several changes, such as aligning with the revised Ofsted reporting arrangements introduced in November 2025, to ensure its indicators remain focused on current and meaningful measures of provider quality. The AAF is ensuring those providers judged as at risk and subject to increased scrutiny increase their quality or leave the system.
- We recognise and proudly champion the pivotal role employers play in delivering successful apprenticeships. We know apprentices achieve their best when employers are fully supported, informed, and engaged. That is why the government is pledging to continue to work side by side with employers to shape high quality apprenticeships that deliver the skills on which our economy depends and open meaningful opportunities for young people.
- We have already strengthened this partnership through a clearer Employer Agreement and by launching a pilot employer training support package, which we will build upon as we learn from employer feedback. We will continue to explore new ways to increase transparency, improve access to guidance, and enhance the support available while remaining committed to giving employers better insights into their performance, removing barriers to participation, and ensuring they feel confident, supported, and empowered to drive up quality and achieve our joint ambition to build the skilled workforce of the future.

³As at end January 2026, 601,240 learners were participating with an apprenticeship provider whose latest overall full Ofsted judgement was good or outstanding, based on participation data reported to DfE covering August 2025 and January 2026 (provisional 2025/26 ILR); the equivalent of 93%. The calculation excludes apprenticeship providers who do not yet have a full Ofsted inspection outcome.

We will continue to build on our strong foundations as the programme undergoes its most significant transformation in a decade.

2) Innovation without compromise

- We are expanding **foundation apprenticeships** into the hospitality and retail - sectors where many young people traditionally begin their careers. We know that young people need more support to transition from education to the workplace. Employers who take on a foundation apprentice in these sectors will be eligible for up to £2,000 to support with these additional costs. We will continue to work with Skills England to identify sectors where there is a need for a foundation apprenticeship.
- **Shorter duration apprenticeships**, meeting the needs of business and the country by granting additional flexibility over the minimum duration, have seen a strong uptake in the post-graduate teacher apprenticeship, supporting the government's plan to recruit 6,500 new teachers as part of our Plan for Change.
- The introduction of **Apprenticeship Units**, built from employer-designed occupational standards using quality-assured knowledge and skills, represent a significant shift toward an agile skills system and allow for high-impact, short-term training. By targeting critical skills in high growth sectors such as Artificial Intelligence and Digital, this will allow companies to fix specific skills bottlenecks quickly. In turn, the economy will see faster returns on investment.
- We have reformed the **English & Maths** requirements to ensure they are a bridge to success, rather than a barrier to gaining occupational competence. The early signs are positive, with an increase in achievement rates in the key standards benefiting from these reforms which is generally exceeding the programme as a whole (at Levels 2-6). This is particularly strong in key sectors such as Early Years and Social Care, meaning more apprentices are now likely to progress and move into sustained employment in critical roles.
- We are **modernising assessment to reduce unnecessary burden**, and make the process more proportionate and timely, while maintaining the quality and rigour of apprenticeship assessment that we have all worked so hard to build.

The innovations that we are bringing to the skills system will deliver the defining missions of this government – growth and opportunity.

3) Growth and Opportunity

- The recent machinery of government changes are designed to align our skills programme with the future strategic direction of the country. **We must ensure that every young person has a clear path to an apprenticeship or a job** and that the unemployed or economically inactive can find new pathways to success through apprenticeships.

- To deliver the next phase of the skills offer and support our ambition to bring 50,000 more young people into apprenticeships, there is record investment, with funding for the growth and skills levy in England increasing to £3.3 billion for the 2026-2027 financial year.
- We are introducing a new incentive of up to £2,000 for non-levy paying employers that take on 16–24-year-old apprentices as new employees. In addition, we are launching a pilot with Mayoral Strategic Authorities to better connect young people to local apprenticeship opportunities.
- We recognise the importance of getting the right apprentice on the right programme and supporting the best circumstances for completion. Ofsted have introduced a standalone 'Inclusion' judgement which considers how leaders and staff identify and support the needs of learners and apprentices. The department has integrated the Ofsted inclusion grade directly into the AAF, and we will act if apprentices with high needs and those from disadvantaged backgrounds are not being satisfactorily supported.
- In addition, we will continue to provide a £3,000 bursary to apprentices in care and care leavers who are under 25, to help them access and complete apprenticeships and transition into employment. Successful identification of care leavers can also unlock additional funding of £1,000 to both employers and training providers when they take on 19 to 24-year-olds who are care leavers, so that they can put in place the support needed for a high-quality experience and help more of these apprentices complete.
- From 1 April 2026, the apprentice minimum wage will see a further increase. Alongside, employers are not required to pay anything towards employees' National Insurance for all apprentices aged up to age 25.⁴

Working alongside Skills England, we will continue to refine the Growth and Skills Offer, so that we strike the right balance between flexibility for business and opportunity for the next generation.

I know that with your proven track record of raising achievement and excellence, we can ensure, together, that the English apprenticeship system remains world-class - modern, flexible, and above all, high-quality.

Thank you for your continued dedication to transforming lives through skills.

Best wishes,



The Rt Hon Pat McFadden MP
Secretary of State for Work and Pensions

⁴ When the employee's wage is below £50,270 a year