



Skills England

Sector Skills Needs Assessment

Professional and Business Services

1 June 2026

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1. Handling Notes

The SNAs use occupations, as defined by Standard Occupation Classification (SOC) codes, to provide an indication of the skills needs for the sectors. These allow for a consistent approach and cross-sector comparison. However, they are an approximation and do not work for all types of employment, particularly in highly specialised and emerging roles. As such, we have expanded our methods by using the newly developed [UK Standard Skills Classification](#) to identify the skill areas relevant for priority occupations.

This is the first step for assessing the future demand for skills across key sectors in terms of both occupations and specific skills areas. All estimates of future employment and skills are highly uncertain and their inclusion here is not for making precise forecasts of employment levels. Rather, the aim is to provide information about the general nature of changing employment patterns and their implications for skill requirements. The projections should be regarded as indicative of general trends and orders of magnitude, given the assumptions set out in section 5 below.

The data and methodology used to create the Skills Needs Assessments are set out in the accompanying tables and technical annex published alongside this report.

2. Executive Summary

According to analysis by Skills England and the Department of Business and Trade, strong employment growth is projected in the Professional and Business Services (PBS) sector, with the 20 priority occupations selected by the Department of Business and Trade projected to increase by 116,000 (9%) between 2025 and 2035. In addition, an estimated 419,000 workers are expected to leave these priority occupations over this period and will need to be replaced, bringing total demand to around 535k workers in 2035.

These roles typically require higher than average proficiency in numeracy, writing, and digital literacy, as well as high proficiency in planning and organising. The majority of projected additional employment (92%) in priority occupations are expected to hold a qualification of level 4 or above, notably higher than across all priority occupations.

Many priority occupations overlap with other sectors: 14 of the 20 priority occupations are shared with at least one other sector, particularly in digital and engineering roles, increasing competition for talent. There is considerable uncertainty around how AI adoption may affect future demand, particularly for digital occupations, which are among those with the highest projected growth.

Almost a quarter (24%) of the identified priority occupations are currently in critical demand, and 71% are either in critical demand or elevated demand.

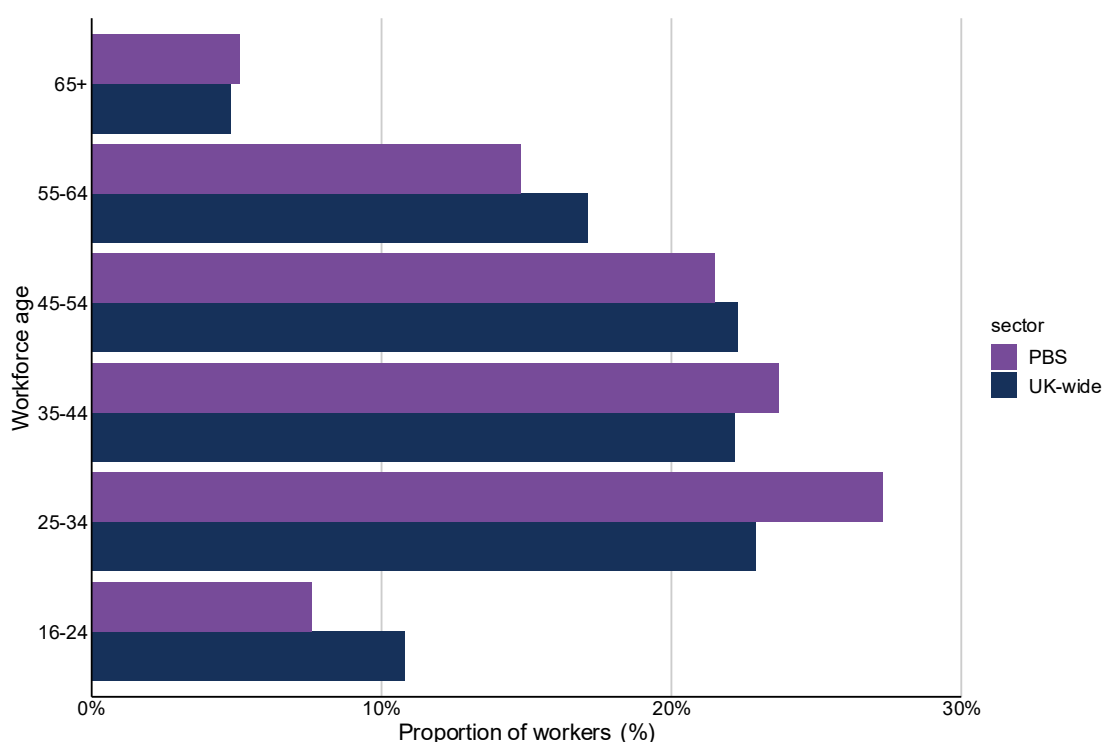
Historically, the most important education pathways into priority occupations are at level 6 and above in higher education, supported by key apprenticeships. Higher education routes include Law, Computing, Economics, and Mathematical Sciences, with large volumes coming from Business and Management routes. Accounting and Finance apprenticeships see almost 2 thirds of learners entering priority occupations aligned with PBS.

Growth in training provision has been strongest in level 6 and higher routes. Between 2021 to 2022 and 2023 to 2024, achievements increased by around 40% for higher education level 6 and above in Business and Management, and Computing, while Accounting and Finance apprenticeships in the level 6 and higher group grew by 32%. More traditional routes such as Law, Mathematical sciences, and Economics at level 6 or higher have grown at a slower rate of between 6% and 7%.

3. Workforce overview and demographics

The UK's Professional and Business Services (PBS) sector has a global reputation for quality and innovation. It is an enabler of growth across the economy, helping businesses to raise finance, scale up, export and invest. The sector accounts for near 12% of UK GVA (ONS, 2026), and employs around 5 million people across the UK ([Employee jobs by industry](#) and [Self-employment jobs by industry](#), ONS, 2026). Professional and business services spans a range of industries, including Accounting, Audit & Tax Consultancy, Legal Services, and Management Consultancy.

Figure 1: Age distribution for the Professional and Business Services (PBS) workforce compared to UK-wide employment in 2025

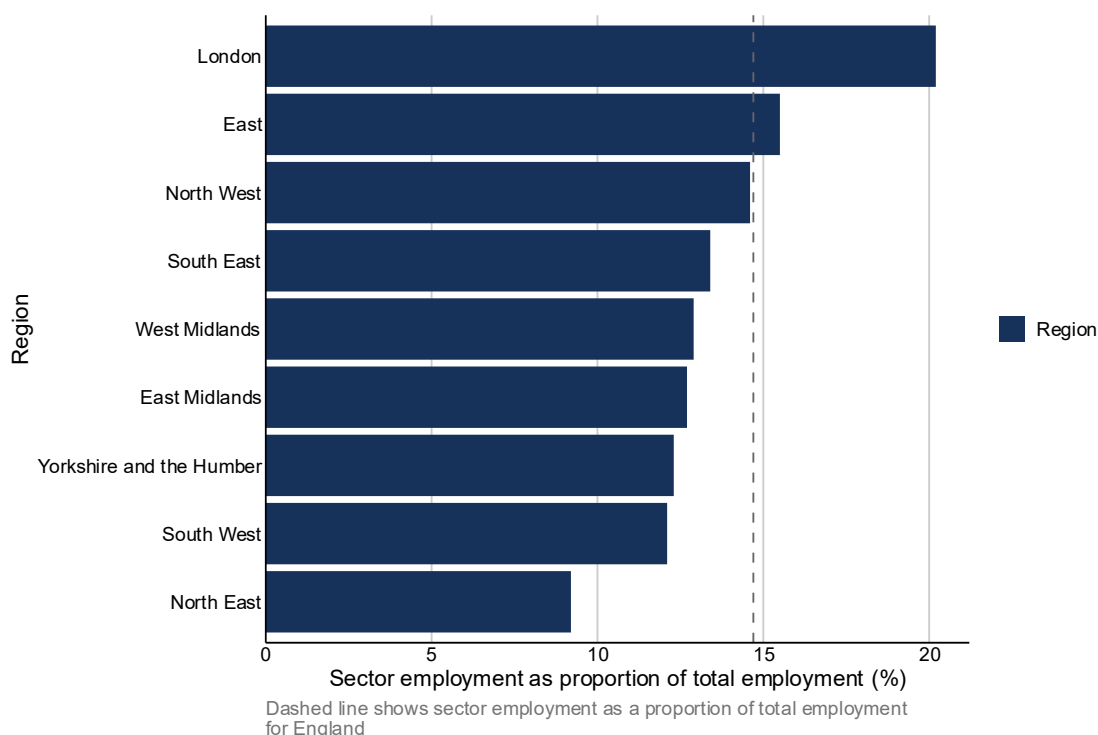


Source: [Annual Population Survey, ONS, 2025 data](#)

As seen in Figure 1, the age profile for the Professional and Business Services workforce appears more concentrated in the age groups of 25 to 34 and 35 to 44 relative to UK-wide employment. The largest age group in Professional and Business Services is 25 to 34 (27.3%), which is 4.4 percentage points higher than the UK average (22.9%). Regarding the sex distribution of the sector, the workforce in Professional and Business Services is 56.7% male, compared with 52.0% across the UK.

Regionally, based on employment estimates from the [Business Register and Employment Survey \(BRES\) 2024 data](#), London has the highest concentration of Professional and Business Services employment at 20.2%. This is shown in Figure 2. The East (15.5%) and North West (14.6%) also exceed or align closely with the England average (14.4%). The North East records the lowest concentration at 9.2%.

Figure 2: Proportion of jobs in the Professional and Business Services Sector, relative to total employment, for English regions, in 2024



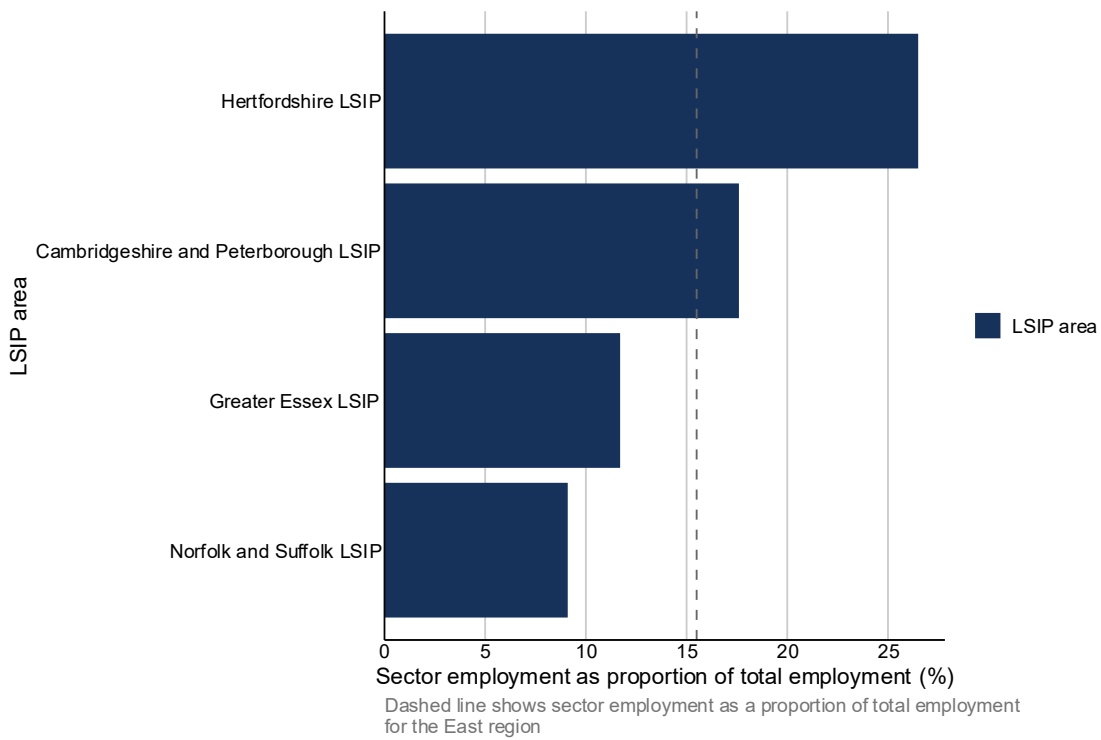
Source: [Business Register and Employment Survey \(BRES\) 2024](#)

A similar pattern of internal variation emerges in the East of England region, the area of England outside of London with the highest proportion employed in PBS. As shown in Figure 3, the Hertfordshire LSIP geography shows the highest concentration of Professional and Business Services roles at 26.5% of total employment. The Cambridgeshire and Peterborough LSIP geography also records a large share at 17.6%, supported by its strong research, innovation, and business ecosystems. The Greater Essex LSIP geography stands at 11.7%, while Norfolk and Suffolk LSIP geography sits at 9.1%. This variation reflects the distribution of business clusters, research parks, and regional service centres within the East of England region.

BRES analyses comparisons are made using LSIP geographies as defined by the designated Employer Representative Body boundaries set out by Skills England, ensuring consistency with the official LSIP framework ([Local skills improvement plans and designated employer representative bodies - GOV.UK](#)).

Note: BRES primarily captures VAT- and PAYE-registered businesses and may therefore underrepresent sectors with high numbers of freelancers or micro-businesses. As a result, apparent regional concentrations may reflect the location of larger employers rather than the full distribution of sectoral employment.

Figure 3: Proportion of jobs in the Professional and Business Services Sector, relative to total employment, for East of England LSIP geographies, in 2024



Source: [Business Register and Employment Survey \(BRES\) 2024](#)

4. Priority Occupations and Current Demand

4.1 Priority Occupations

Skills England has been working with the Department of Business and Trade to identify significant occupations in the PBS sector. Priority occupations were selected by the department based on an analysis of the Annual Population Survey, mapping the most important occupations by relevant Standard Industrial Classification (SIC) codes.

There are 20 priority occupations for Professional and Business Services, 14 of which overlap with at least one other sector, covering a range of occupation types. The occupations with the most overlap are listed below. The sectors that overlap the most with Professional and Business Services in terms of priority occupations are Life Sciences and Creative Industries.

There are 6 PBS priority occupations which do not overlap with the priority occupations selected for any other priority sectors: Solicitors and lawyers, Chartered and certified accountants, Directors in consultancy services, Legal associate professionals, Book-keepers, payroll managers and wages clerks, and Other administrative occupations not elsewhere classified (n.e.c). These occupations face no projected additional demand from other priority sectors.

Table 1: PBS priority occupations appearing in at least 2 other sectors

Occupation	Number of sectors including Professional and Business Services
Programmers and software development professionals	7
Engineering professionals n.e.c.	5
Financial managers and directors	4
Civil engineers	4
Marketing, sales and advertising directors	3
Architects	3

Of the priority occupations in PBS, 24% are in critical demand (substantially higher demand than usual) and 71% are in either critical or elevated demand (above average). This is based on [Skills England's Occupations in demand analysis, published in 2025](#). This illustrates a high level of current demand for the priority occupations identified by the sector.

4.2 Demand for Skills

The UK's first [Standard Skills Classification \(SSC\)](#) provides a mapping of relevant skill areas to occupations. Using an initial prototype of the SSC, experimental analysis was conducted to identify the skill areas which are relevant to priority occupations. Across the priority occupations in the Professional and Business Services sector, the top 3 technical skill areas are:

- Analysing financial data and forecasting budgets
- Managing financial operations and payroll
- Developing and implementing marketing strategies

4.2.1 Core Skills

The SSC also sets out 13 'Core Skills', which are fundamental abilities that contribute to the capability to carry out the tasks associated with a specific job, such as numeracy, reading, and writing. They are often transferable, meaning they can be applied across different sectors of activity and roles. The SSC provides proficiency scores for core skills by occupation, on a 1 to 5 scale from minimal proficiency to expert proficiency.

The 13 Core Skills defined in the UK Standard Skills Classification (SSC) are listed below. These are foundational, transferable abilities required across occupations, and they are listed explicitly in the [SSC Core Skills Explorer](#).

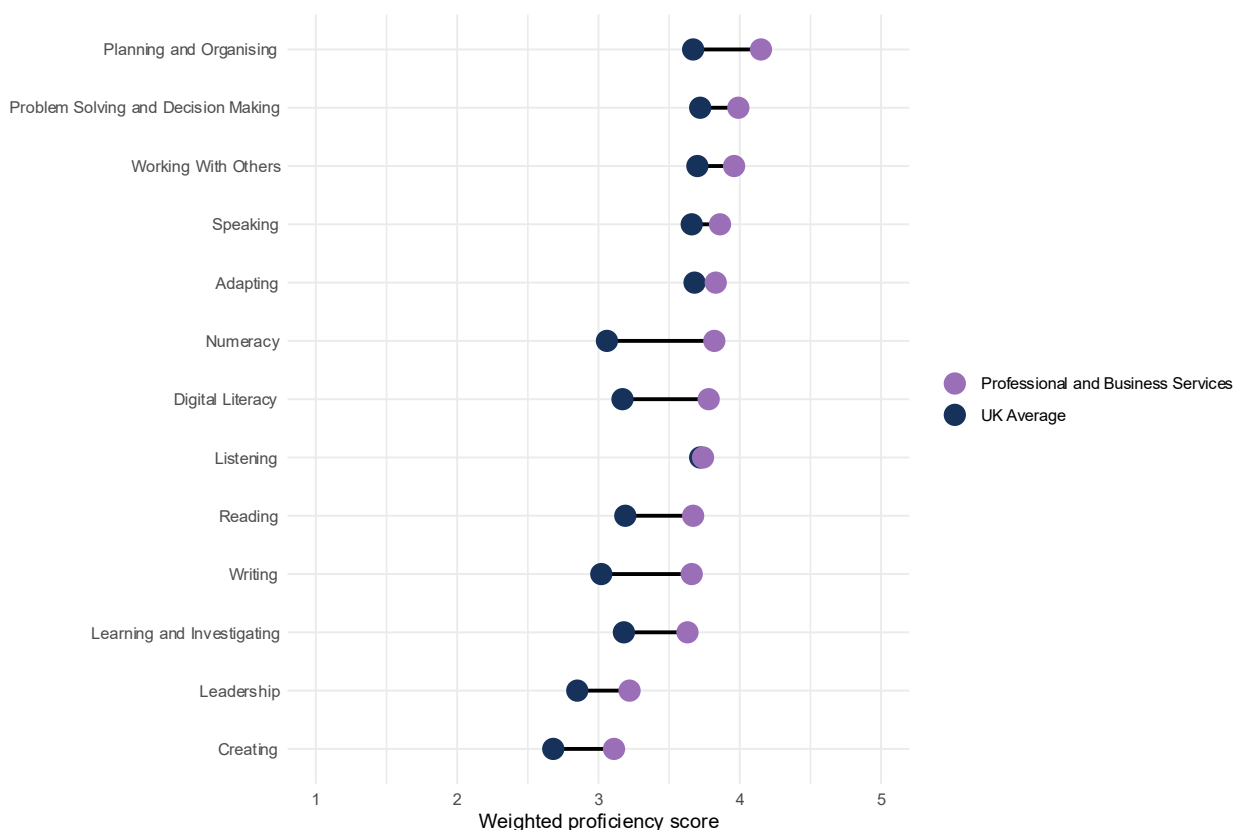
- **Planning and Organising** – Setting goals, prioritising tasks, structuring approaches.
- **Adapting** – Adjusting strategies or behaviour to new or changing situations.
- **Working With Others** – Collaborating effectively with teams or groups.
- **Listening** – Understanding spoken communication, including non-verbal cues.
- **Speaking** – Communicating clearly and confidently through speech.
- **Leadership** – Motivating, guiding, and inspiring others.
- **Learning and Investigating** – Searching for, gathering, and understanding new information.
- **Creating** – Developing original ideas, innovations, or solutions.

- **Problem Solving and Decision Making** – Identifying issues, analysing information, selecting solutions.
- **Numeracy** – Applying mathematical techniques and interpreting numerical data.
- **Digital Literacy** – Using digital tools and technologies effectively (including AI).
- **Reading** – Interpreting written information accurately.
- **Writing** – Communicating ideas clearly and persuasively in written form

The required proficiency in core skills for the priority occupations have been compared to the UK average. Where core skills have a higher required proficiency in priority occupations, this suggests that these skills are particularly important for these occupations. The graph below shows which core skills are important for the Professional and Business Services sector compared with the wider UK average.

Professional and Business Services requires notably higher proficiency in the core skills: Numeracy (3.8 vs 3.1); Writing (3.7 vs 3.0); Digital Literacy (3.8 vs 3.2).

Figure 4: Core skills proficiency for the PBS sector compared with the UK Average



Source: Internal analysis using the UK Standard Skills Classification

5. Future Demand for Priority Occupations

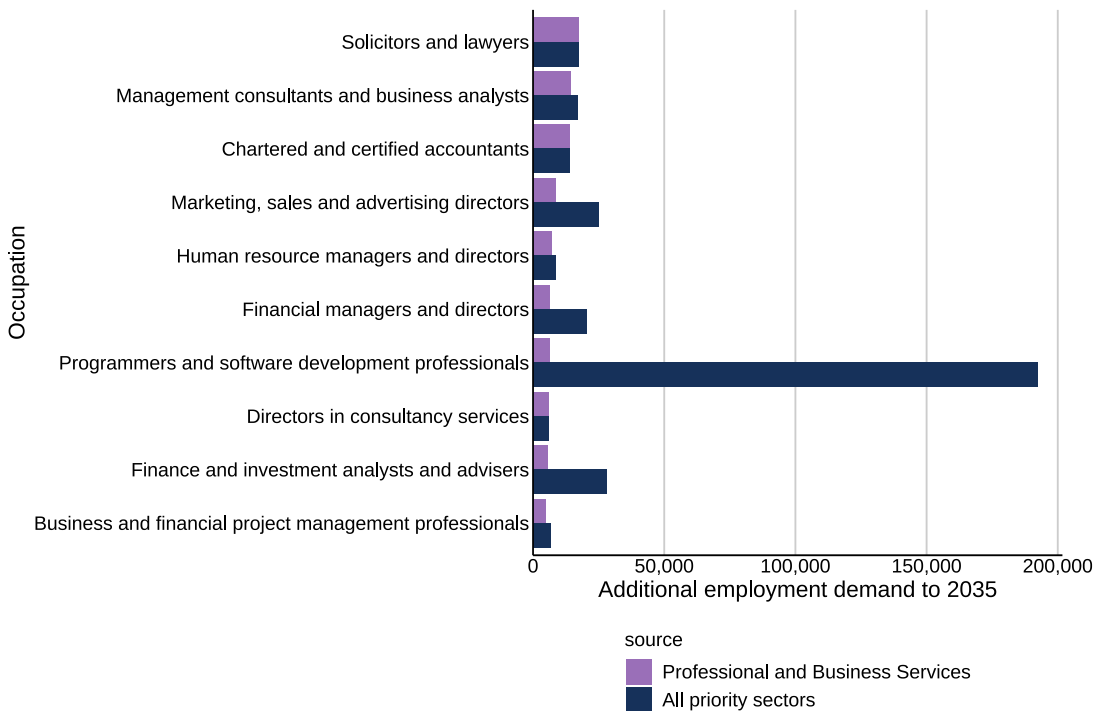
Employment demand is set to rise sharply for priority occupations within the PBS sector, increasing by 116,000 (9%) between 2025 and 2035.

The demand projections for priority occupations have been estimated using the ‘baseline’ scenario from [the Skills Imperative economy-wide projections](#). The growth rates were applied to historic and current actual figures estimated from the 2024 [Annual Population Survey](#). There is a simplifying assumption made that occupation growth is even across all the sectors it appears in. In practice, some subsectors will display variable growth rates depending on their sensitivity to trends like AI or [offshoring](#).

5.1 Top Occupations by Employment Growth to 2035

As seen in Figure 5, the occupation with the highest projected employment demand in Professional and Business Services is Solicitors and lawyers, with 17,300 additional workers needed in the sector between 2025 and 2035. This occupation does not face any projected additional demand from other priority sectors.

Figure 5: Top 10 priority occupations in the PBS sector by additional employment to 2035



Source: Demand projections provided by Department for Business and Trade.

5.2 Expected Qualification Levels

Workers in the priority occupations for PBS are expected to be much more concentrated in qualification levels 4 and above than in other sectors. As shown in Table 2 below, the majority (92%) of projected additional employment in priority occupations requires workers with qualifications at level 4 and above.

Table 2: Expected qualification level of workers in priority occupations

Priority Occupations	Level 2 or 3	Level 4 or above
Professional and Business Services priority occupations	8%	92%
All priority occupations	38%	62%

Source: Skills England planning scenarios based on sector-level projections

5.3 Alternative Scenarios

Any future projection of how the economy will evolve is inherently uncertain. This uncertainty increases the further forward the projection extends. To improve the understanding of the uncertainty in the skills assessment projections, Skills England asked the sponsoring department to provide at least one alternative scenario. The total job growth in the alternative scenarios are shown in Table 3: Alternative demand scenarios for Professional and Business Services below.

These scenarios have been calculated by using forecasted annual growth rates from the 'human-centric' and 'technological opportunities' scenarios, respectively, from [the Skills Imperative economy-wide projections](#). Further information on these scenarios can be found here: [the Skills Imperative 2035: Occupational Outlook – Long-run employment prospects for the UK, Alternative Scenarios Working Paper 2b](#). The growth rates were applied to historic and current actual figures estimated from the 2024 [Annual Population Survey](#). This approach differs to the main scenario, which is presented in Figure 5, which used the 'baseline' scenario from [the Skills Imperative economy-wide projections](#).

In the first alternative scenario, growth in priority occupations is lower by 27,900 workers (at 88,100) when compared with the main scenario (116,000). The growth rate is 7%, which is 2 percentage points lower than the main scenario (9%). In the second alternative scenario, growth in priority occupations is lower by 27,300 workers (at 88,700) compared with the main scenario.

Table 3: Alternative demand scenarios for Professional and Business Services

Scenario	Increase in employment demand from 2025 to 2035	Percentage change in employment demand from 2025 to 2035
Main: baseline growth rates	116,000	9%
Alternative scenario 1: 'human-centric' scenario growth rates	88,100	7%
Alternative scenario 2: 'technological opportunities' scenario growth rates	88,700	7%

Numbers rounded to nearest 100

Source: Demand projections from DBT

The uncertainty in many of the projections is far greater currently due to the accelerated adopting of AI technology. Such technology will increase the productivity of many jobs and possibly reduce the demand for new workers in affected occupations. The speed of these changes will be uneven across the economy and very uncertain.

The uncertainty caused by AI has been a significant issue for the assessment of the Professional and Business Services sector, not least as digital occupations have seen some of the highest projected growth rates and these occupations are seeing some of the greatest AI-related changes. For the purposes of this assessment, we have not adjusted the projections provided by sector experts to take account of AI adoption as the evidence for these changes is not currently strong. Furthermore, the growth in digital occupations is as much to do with the broad digitalisation of many sectors which is well established, as opposed to just a narrow growth in demand. However, it needs to be recognised that there is a heightened risk that projections of AI-exposed occupations including digital occupations are too high. Skills England intends to conduct some further work over the next year to understand the risks more fully.

5.4 Replacement Demand

In addition to expansion demand, where we consider the additional workers needed due to expected future sector growth, there is also demand for workers required to replace existing workers in the labour market. This is known as replacement demand. This is a broad estimate, based on applying rates from economy wide projections.

Our analysis focusses on expansion demand and assumes current supply is sufficient to maintain the existing size of the workforce. In practice, this will not be the case for some occupations.

Each year we estimate an average of 41,900 workers needing to be replaced within priority occupations in Professional and Business Services. Over the 10-year period of 2026 to 2035, the total estimated replacement demand is 419,000 workers.

This increases the total demand for workers. When combining this with total additional employment demand to 2035 (116,000), the total demand for workers in priority occupations in Professional and Business Services is 535,000.

6. Influence of AI on the Professional and Business Services Sector

[Adoption of AI is reshaping the landscape for the Professional and Business Services sector](#), with tools increasingly used for recruitment screening, workforce management, legal review and contract analysis.

AI adoption in professional and business services is growing but is uneven, with larger service firms leading AI adoption and barriers persisting for others ([‘AI skills for the UK workforce - GOV.UK, 2025’](#) and [ONS, 2025](#)). Evidence from our deep dives with sector leads highlights that whilst some routine roles are being automated, the overall outlook on workforce demand is not necessarily leading to job losses – instead roles are being redefined to require AI capability.

Further evidence suggests that:

- Across legal, accounting, audit, and recruitment functions, AI is driving efficiency, evolving roles, and prompting new governance and oversight practices ([Legal IT Insider, 2024](#); [ACCA Global, 2025](#); [Responsible AI in Recruitment - GOV.UK, 2024](#), [Public attitudes to data and AI: Tracker survey - GOV.UK, 2022](#)). However, [human intervention is imperative](#) at critical junctures.
- [AI is transforming the HR profession](#), streamlining recruitment processes across all levels but also introducing new demands for digital fluency, bias awareness, and regulatory compliance. While these technologies improve efficiency, they risk perpetuating historical biases against groups such as ethnic minorities, women, and disabled candidates.
- [AI is transforming the legal sector](#) by enhancing contract analysis, supporting critical interpretation of tool outputs, and streamlining client communications. However, smaller firms often face barriers to AI upskilling due to limited resources and regional disparities, resulting in inconsistent access to training.

Skills England commissioned Dr Nisreen Ameen to develop an [AI Skills tools package](#). As part of this, evidence from deep-dive workshops with sector leads and Skills England’s research and analysis report on [AI skills for the UK workforce](#) shows that AI skills in demand can be mapped to three broad domains::

- **Technical skills:** Ability to operate and integrate AI tools within professional workflows, including contract analysis, compliance monitoring, recruitment systems, and document automation; data and metadata literacy; and configuring low/no-code automation tools to support service delivery.
- **Non-technical skills:** Communicating AI-derived insights to clients and stakeholders; change management within partnership-based and client-facing firms; collaboration between domain specialists and technical teams; and leadership capability to define productive AI use and reinvest efficiency gains.
- **Responsible and ethical skills:** Auditability and defensibility of AI-assisted decisions; transparency and explainability in regulated client contexts; understanding regulatory

obligations and professional standards; awareness of AI risks in recruitment and decision-making; capability to implement governance structures for responsible deployment; professional judgement when using AI outputs; interrogating and validating AI-generated advice before client delivery; and understanding changing liability and accountability structures.

7. Education Supply

As part of this assessment, we have considered the supply of workers in priority occupations relevant to the Professional and Business Services sector. Employment in the sector is influenced by a range of joiners (inflows) and leavers (outflows), as illustrated in Figure 6. This analysis focuses on one component of supply: inflows from education.

Education inflows capture individuals who move from education into employment in priority occupations. This group is predominantly made up of career starters, while also including a smaller number of job switchers and individuals returning to work. Taken together, these flows provide a robust and consistent indicator of the pipeline of new talent entering priority occupations and form a reliable basis for understanding the contribution of the education system to workforce supply.

Figure 6: Stock and flow of joiners and leavers into PBS

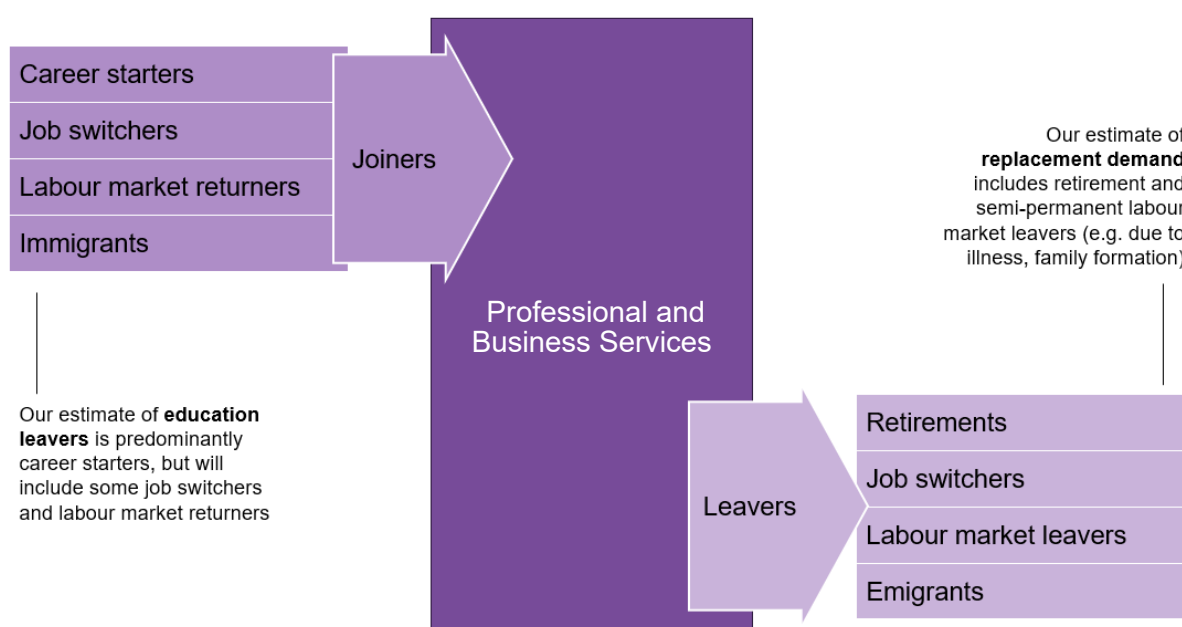


Figure 6 is a stock and flow diagram showing how people join the Professional and Business Services sector, listed as career starters, job switchers, returners, immigrants. It then shows what makes them leave: retirements, job switchers, labour market leavers, emigrants. For joiners, the diagram states that Skills England's estimate of education leavers is predominantly career starters, but will include some job switchers and labour market returners. For leavers, the diagram outlines that Skills England's estimate of replacement demand includes retirement and semi-permanent labour market leavers (for example, due to illness, family formation).

7.1 Important training routes

There are multiple routes by which people enter employment in a given occupation. Using information on historic pathways into these occupations and the [Skills England Occupational Maps](#), we have identified the most prominent routes that provide direct

supply into priority occupations identified for the Professional and Business Services sector. The routes relate to entry into the occupation but cover all industries and are not specific to employment in the Professional and Business Services sector. These routes are summarised in Table 4.

Training routes are listed below by the proportion of education leavers in employment that enter a priority occupation listed by DCMS. The volume of education leavers is also listed for a particular route.

Key training routes broadly split into 3 types of courses:

- Well-aligned routes, often technical in nature, where a high proportion of leavers progress into priority occupations, but sometimes with small cohorts.
- Balanced routes, where a reasonable proportion of leavers progress into priority occupations from a larger cohort.
- High volume routes, where a smaller proportion of leavers progress to priority occupations but contribute a large share of employment.

Not all 3 course types are present in all sectors. For well-aligned routes, increasing the supply into priority occupations will likely require an increase in enrolments. Whereas for other routes that are less well-aligned, increasing the progression rates to priority occupations may be more effective.

Table 4: Key routes related to priority occupations for the Professional and Business Services sector

Pathway	Subject area	Level group	Number of education leavers entering priority occupations	Percentage of employed education leavers entering priority occupations
Apprenticeship	Accounting And Finance	Level 4/5	1,010	72%
Apprenticeship	Accounting And Finance	Level 6+	1,880	65%
Apprenticeship	Accounting And Finance	Level 2/3	1,310	59%
Higher Education	Law	Level 6+	6,290	46%

Higher Education	Computing	Level 6+	5,140	41%
Higher Education	Economics	Level 6+	1,900	39%
Higher Education	Mathematical Sciences	Level 6+	1,590	39%
Higher Education	Business And Management	Level 6+	13,860	37%

Source: Skills England estimates based on employment in 2022 to 2023 tax year

Note: The routes relate to entry into the priority occupations identified by DBT but, as these occupations can span multiple sectors beyond Professional and Business Services, this analysis is not strictly specific to employment in the PBS sector.

The 8 routes in Table 4 account for 44% of education leavers entering priority occupations for the sector. Level 6+ routes are most important for Professional and Business Services. The range of subjects for higher education demonstrates the wide pool of education leavers entering the sector, and the different professions covered by the sector. There is evidence that other level 6+ higher education subject areas may also be important for specific priority occupations in the sector: Architecture, Building and planning for architects, Engineering for engineering professionals, and English studies for advertising and marketing associate professionals. Additional administration apprenticeships at all levels contribute to other administrative occupations, and Accounting and finance apprenticeships below level 6 also have very strong shares of education leavers entering priority occupations.

Some newer training routes are not included in the historic data, including newer apprenticeship standards and Skills Bootcamps. Overall, based on the [Skills England Occupational Maps](#), there are 72 apprenticeship standards linked to priority occupations in the sector, including the level 6 accounting finance manager standard which has been recently introduced. These are across all levels, predominantly in administration, business management, and accounting and finance.

7.2 Trends in training routes

We can get a sense of how supply into priority occupations is changing by looking at the number of learners successfully completing a course that is aligned with these occupations. Where courses have grown in achievement numbers, this could suggest that these courses will continue to be key pathways into priority occupations in the sector. Table 5 gives an overview of the change in achievement figures for the key routes over the 2 years between 2021 to 2022 and 2023 to 2024.

Table 5: Growth in achievements for key routes related to priority occupations

Pathway	Subject area	Level group	Achievements in 2023 to 2024	Growth in achievements since 2021 to 2022
Higher Education	Business And Management	Level 6+	187,750	+41%
Higher Education	Computing	Level 6+	50,280	+40%
Apprenticeship	Accounting And Finance	Level 6+	5,140	+32%
Apprenticeship	Accounting and Finance	Level 2/3	4,210	+30%
Apprenticeship	Accounting and Finance	Level 4/5	2,430	+11%
Higher Education	Law	Level 6+	42,400	+7%
Higher Education	Mathematical Sciences	Level 6+	13,500	+7%
Higher Education	Economics	Level 6+	17,710	+6%

Source: Figures provided by the Department for Education

Computing, Business and Management, and Accounting and Finance have all seen substantial growth and will continue to be important supply entrants to the sector. The other level 6+ higher education subject areas are also growing steadily, though at a lower rate.