



The
St Martin's
Group

June 2023

The St Martin's Group: A manifesto for our future skills system

The St Martin's Group (SMG) is a unique membership organisation created to support the UK economy by fostering a sustainable, quality-focused, and employer-led apprenticeship and skills system. Our members bring together the experiences and expertise of large employers, awarding organisations and leading training providers. Our organisation was formed in 2019 to provide practical support to policymakers as they seek to create a world-class, employer-led, work based funded skills system for the UK.

To achieve this goal, the SMG is calling for the following missions for a future skills system:

Mission 1: A system that provides opportunity for all

Mission 2: A skills system that truly works for employers

Mission 3: A stable system that is quality focused and sustainable

By focusing on these missions, the UK can build a skills system that is inclusive, effective, and responsive to the needs of learners and employers alike.

Mission 1: A system that provides opportunities for all

Building a skills system that provides opportunities for all learners, regardless of their background, that is more accessible and inclusive.

The SMG believes widening participation and lifelong learning should underpin any future UK skills system if we are to build a pipeline of diverse talent to fill vital skills needs in both the short and long term.

Today's school leavers have 50-year careers, which means that a genuine system for all must be in place. This should be a comprehensive

and accessible system, creating a skilled, diverse, and adaptable workforce by supporting career development throughout an individual's life; from those starting their first job, to those who are seeking to upskill or reskill during their career.

The SMG is therefore calling for the following commitments in order to achieve this mission:

Creating opportunities to broaden participation

- Increase support for lower-level programmes and qualifications. These provide important routes into jobs and create a more diverse pipeline for higher level opportunities. This should include a review of entry-level funding and other incentives required for investment and delivery.
- In consultation with government, allow employers to select qualifications and skills programmes at level 2 and below based on need, and provide funding where there is sufficient and appropriate employer demand. Address gaps at entry level where T-levels are not accessible, and access to other level 3 qualifications which are beyond an individual's reach.
- Allow qualifications in apprenticeship programmes to be retained if recommended by employers, providers and learners.



Broadening opportunity through careers advice and guidance for all

- Simplify and communicate the range of pathways available to learners, including vocational and technical education, qualifications, and training options. Demonstrate how these link and lead to progression both within occupations and across occupations. Make this information available in one place.
- Consider core soft skills as essential training for career development, mobility, and productivity, and allow these to form part of the funded skills offer.
- Ensure careers advice is informed by employers, with regional and national workforce requirements. Consolidated information should be accessible for learners, education providers and parents.
- Careers advice should be for all ages; in addition to increasing guidance available to young people through schools and colleges, more focus should be given to post-18 careers advice, supporting lifelong learning, reskilling and mobility within careers.

Mission 2: A skills system that truly works for employers

Empowering employers to lead the way in creating a skills system that meets their needs and drives productivity.

For learners and businesses to truly feel the benefits of our skills system, it must work for employers. An employer-led system sees employers sit at the heart of decision-making, informed and supported by other parts of the system. Taking this approach will ensure any skills system meets the needs of learners, providers, employers, and government.

The SMG is therefore calling for the following commitments in order to achieve this mission:

Enhancing the Employer Voice and Balancing Involvement

➤ Create a clear and effective route for employers to input into skills needs regionally and nationally. This should ensure large employers operating across multiple regions are able to engage where participation across several Local Skills Improvement Plans (LSIPs) is not possible.

➤ Allow government and employers to agree where engagement is crucial and where it may be better placed with other parties in the system. For example, in the design of skills programmes such as apprenticeships, the use of representative or skills bodies would reduce employer burden and fatigue and accelerate time to delivery.

Enabling employers to provide the right offer

➤ Government, devolved authorities, and employers should work hand-in-hand to ensure information and funding for the range of skills programmes and training available to employers, is easy to access. Funding principles and procurement processes should be as consistent as possible, and aligned with regional and national skills needs, as informed by employers.

➤ Provide long term financial commitment for spend on apprenticeships and the wider skills system. The Government should commit to a minimum spending over at least a five-year period to provide the confidence for long term planning and investment.

➤ Simplify communication on the range of skills programmes and qualifications available to employers and how they align and link to progression. Remove barriers to progression for programmes at the same level, where a higher level is not accessible, for example, allowing T-Levels to lead into another level 3 programme.

➤ Protect employers' choice on how to use the Apprenticeship Levy. Allow employers to use their Levy contribution to meet business requirements and, critically, ensure they have a say in any proposed changes to the Levy. Consultation with employers and industry bodies is essential in ensuring the Levy remains relevant and effective in driving the necessary improvements in skills and productivity.

Supporting innovation and the future-proofing of apprenticeships

➤ To be relevant and reflect changing workforce needs, the process for designing and reviewing apprenticeship standards should be faster, more flexible and more agile.

➤ Prioritise employer needs in the design of apprenticeship standards.

➤ Increase SME participation by broadening apprenticeship standards to support multi-skilling and transferable, core soft skills. This should be reflected in all new apprenticeships and be part of the review process for existing apprenticeships.

➤ Apply a modular design or credit system to apprenticeships with a longer duration, as seen with other higher education pathways and the new lifelong loan entitlement. This will aid retention and completion strategies for employers.

➤ Make the Maths and English component of apprenticeships truly functional and relevant to the apprenticeship standard. The requirement to pass a functional skills test should be removed as a prerequisite to completion of an apprenticeship, aligning it with other education and skills programmes and qualifications.

Mission 3: A stable system that is quality focused and sustainable

Establishing a stable and forward-thinking skills system that delivers sustainable outcomes and supports economic growth.

A stable and predictable policy environment is essential for the future of the skills system, with scope for flexibility when appropriate.

The SMG supports an environment in which the system can flourish, providing benefits to individuals, businesses and the economy.

The SMG is therefore calling for the following commitments in order to achieve this mission:

Widening the Levy to an 'Apprenticeship, Skills and Productivity Levy'

➤ Allow employers to use their Levy contribution to meet their business requirements and include regulated, wider skills programmes or qualifications. These should easily lead to and from apprenticeships, recognising prior learning and supporting lifelong learning. It should also include the option to transfer more than 25% of Levy funds to SMEs. A percentage of Levy funds could be ringfenced for apprenticeships, with additional funds protected for SMEs.

➤ Extend the parameters of the current Apprenticeship Levy by; reviewing the definition of eligible businesses who could contribute to the Levy; or reviewing the threshold at which the Levy starts to be paid.

➤ Review apprenticeship funding bands to reflect inflation. The review process needs to be flexible and agile. Standards need to be financially viable to deliver, to ensure quality of delivery is not compromised.

➤ Increase investment in the adult education budget to support the diversification of learners; younger groups and those from low socio-economic backgrounds for example, to access skills and jobs, providing a robust pipeline for employers.

Creating a more cohesive system

➤ Ensure greater cohesion on policy and interventions across government departments with relevant mandates, including education, jobs, skills, levelling up and productivity.

➤ Clarify responsibilities of DfE, Ofsted, IFATE, ESFA and Ofqual to remove duplication and uncertainty.

➤ Make clearer the alignment of interventions such as the Institutes of Technology and Local Skills Improvement Plans in order to simplify structures and help all parties in the system navigate the best routes for engagement.

Taking a more holistic approach to measuring success

➤ Include government, employers and learners in defining measures of success for all skills programmes.

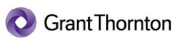
➤ Use alternative outcomes for apprenticeship programmes as quality measures such as transition to employment and progression. These should be over and above the current achievement rates.

➤ Allow employers to share accountability for successful outcomes in apprenticeships and incentivise them to focus on completions.



Our current members

Our membership is expanding, current members of the St Martin's Group include:



Pearson



A City & Guilds Group Collaboration



For further information or to arrange a meeting to discuss these missions and recommendations in more detail, please contact secretariat@stmartinsgroup.org

