



OVERCOMING BARRIERS
TO OPPORTUNITY;

STIMULATING GROWTH
AND UNLOCKING SUPPLY
IN UK APPRENTICESHIPS

September 2024

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Foreword

Our aim at The St Martin's Group is to provide evidence-based, practical solutions for sustainability, quality and growth in apprenticeships and skills. For the past three years, we've focused on the benefits of apprenticeships to individuals and organisations and how, with the right support, we can maximise their return on investment. However, benefits cannot be realised without opportunities, and there is clear evidence of increasing demand for apprenticeships that is not being met.

In our latest research, The St Martin's Group examined apprenticeship opportunities. We aimed to understand the extent of the demand for apprenticeships; where it was coming from, and its potential growth, given the rising interest from young people leaving education and organisations seeking to upskill and reskill to meet critical skills needs. We also explored what it would take to increase supply; identifying current barriers, the specific support employers need to expand their apprenticeship offerings and how we can ensure fair access to these opportunities.

Our Group is well-known for bringing together those responsible for creating supply and those who deliver it. Our membership and wider network comprise leading employers, training providers and awarding organisations from various sectors across the UK, all with significant experience of the FE and Skills system. These organisations have provided valuable insights into what is needed to unlock supply, which we have consolidated into a timely report for stakeholders and policymakers, as we enter a new parliamentary term and transition into a new government with a focus on removing barriers to opportunity.

While The St Martin's Group supports proposals for a Growth and Skills Levy that enables employers to make greater use of the levy they pay to spend on training for their workforce, it also advocates for the protection of apprenticeships.

It is essential to maintain effective parts of the current system – an inclusive, all-age, all-level system that is quality focused and employer-led. We need to transform parts that act as barriers, incorporating necessary flexibilities in programme design and funding rules. Closer alignment of levy funds with the apprenticeship budget will be crucial, and we must stimulate supply from SMEs which play a significant role in provision.

Only then can we effectively meet growing demand and achieve our shared goals of supporting and training more apprentices for a sustainable skills pipeline.



Brenda McLeish

Co-Chair of SMG



Jane Hadfield

Co-Chair of SMG

- **Introducing flexibility to overcome barriers in the current system could release funds and should be prioritised to stimulate growth, especially for SMEs.** Flexibilities related to the 12-month minimum duration rule, as well as the need to obtain Maths and English qualifications prior to completing an apprenticeship, should be considered to boost participation. Stackable, modules that could be incorporated into programme design could meet needs for multi-skilling, specialist training and critical skills.
- **A protected Apprenticeship Budget with closer alignment to funds collected via the Apprenticeship Levy is needed to create a financially sustainable apprenticeship system.** The apprenticeship budget underspent by £17 million in 2023-24, equating to 1% of the £2.529 billion available. Without additional funds, delivering more qualifications and training under the proposed Growth and Skills Levy could reduce the number of apprenticeship opportunities available and risk efforts to further SME participation.
- **More generous funding for apprenticeships to support SME engagement should be considered as a priority.** SMEs are key to unlocking apprenticeships supply in the UK but starts have fallen in recent years. The Government's apprentice incentive payments issued in response to the Covid-19 pandemic shows that financial support helps create opportunities,

particularly for young people². The re-introduction of financial incentives would stimulate demand, giving SMEs more confidence to meet the costs of hiring and managing apprentices.

- **A review of financial measures, including the impact to welfare benefits of taking up an apprenticeship should be conducted.** Interest in apprenticeships from disadvantaged individuals far outweighs the number who start an apprenticeship. This is more pronounced at higher levels and is disproportionate to their less disadvantaged peers. Additional financial support and the removal of disincentives will help to widen participation.
- **Skills reform should seek to transform parts of the skills and apprenticeship system that do not work but should avoid total recreation.** To unlock supply, aspects of the current system that work should be maintained including continuing employer choice of provision, an all-age, all-level apprenticeship programme and a focus on quality. Any change should be consulted on and implementation phased. Skills England should be set up to enable those who create demand and those who deliver to it, are equally represented in skills policy development. There is an opportunity for a more unified approach across government, regions and nations to unlock the supply of apprenticeships.



¹ Social Mobility Commission, [Apprenticeships: Bridging the Gap for Disadvantaged Learners?](#), 09.02.24

² Department for Education, [Apprenticeship and traineeships data for 2021 / 22 academic year](#), 21.07.22

Methodology and Report Structure

This report examines the growing demand for apprenticeships and provides practical solutions for unlocking supply to meet this challenge.

It is informed by data modelling commissioned from UCAS in 2024, which examines how the UK's 18-year-old population growth and rising interest in reskilling and upskilling current employees will impact future demand for apprenticeships, as well as how demand will be spread across level, sector and region.

The data referenced throughout this report is taken from the UCAS.com registrant database for the 2023 application year and UCAS undergraduate application data for the 2023 cycle. Alongside this, official statistics on apprenticeship starts from the devolved administrations have been used.

UCAS data provides clear evidence that demand already outstrips supply. To understand how we can stimulate more opportunities, The St Martin's Group hosted a series of roundtables between January and March 2024 with stakeholders from over 65 organisations. The organisations included employers, training providers, awarding organisations, government representatives, sector bodies and charities from industries including retail, technology, construction, finance, logistics, healthcare, manufacturing, hospitality and energy. The qualitative data has been analysed thematically to draw out commonalities.

This report presents the findings of this work.

The first section outlines the rising demand for apprenticeships, barriers to creating supply, and the impact on disadvantaged groups.

The second section puts forward five areas of consideration for politicians and policymakers, and recommendations to take forward.



Introduction

The total number of apprenticeship starts has declined in the past years. In England, **starts fell by 33% (160,000) in 2022/23 compared to 2014/15**³. In this time, apprenticeship starts in small and medium sized enterprises (SMEs) have fallen disproportionately against large business. Against that backdrop, demand for apprenticeships has grown significantly. **In 2023, half a million people registered on UCAS Hub were interested in an apprenticeship.** This interest significantly exceeded the number of individuals starting an apprenticeship at level 3+.

Previous research by The St Martin's Group has focused on the benefits of apprenticeships to individuals and organisations, and how with the right support, they lead to successful outcomes and a return on investment. However, benefits cannot be realised without opportunities and already, there are not enough to meet demand.

And the gap between demand and supply is set to increase. UCAS has been exploring the potential impact of the growing 18-year-old demographic⁴. The rising 18–19-year-old population presents both an opportunity and challenge for the sector – with an overarching need to ensure these individuals have access to high quality opportunities across the full range of post-18 destinations.

Demand for apprenticeships is not just from young people. Individuals looking to progress later in their careers will also drive demand, and this is likely to increase given reskilling and upskilling needs in the UK. However, for the purpose of this report, The St Martin's Group sought to further understand what the growing 18–19-year-old demographic, as the clearest data source, means for future apprenticeship demand. The group set out to answer three key questions:

- *What does the growth in the 18/19-year-old population mean for demand in apprenticeships, and where could this demand be?*
- *How can employers be supported to increase the supply of apprenticeship opportunities?*
- *How do we ensure that individuals from the most disadvantaged backgrounds can access apprenticeship opportunities?*

The evidence in this study is collected through **UCAS insights from application data** (see technical notes for further details), as well as a series of roundtables held with stakeholders from a range of industries throughout January to March this year. With their combined firsthand experience of the FE and Skills sector, their collective voices provide a unique and comprehensive perspective on the challenges and opportunities for apprenticeships. As we transition into a new government, this report provides timely insight for policymakers and the sector more broadly on removing barriers to opportunity and stimulating growth.



Apprenticeship starts fell by **33%** between 2014/15 and 2022/23



In 2023, **half a million** people registered on UCAS Hub were interested in an apprenticeship



The gap between supply and demand is **set to increase**

³ Association of Colleges & London Economics, *Investigating the impact of the Apprenticeship Levy on training outcomes*, January 2024

⁴ UCAS, *Journey to a million*, 2024

Part 1 - The Challenge

Current Demand - the difference between interest and apprenticeship starts

There are approximately **300,000 apprenticeship starts each year at level 3+** or equivalent across all the four UK nations and of this, **113,000 starts at level 4+** in England⁵. In 2023, of the 1.3 million individuals who registered with UCAS, half a million were interested in an apprenticeship, of which around 357,000 are domiciled in the UK. This interest significantly exceeds the number of individuals starting an apprenticeship at level 3+.

This gap in supply and demand of apprenticeships is even more pronounced for young learners. **45% of English young people registered with UCAS are interested in an apprenticeship**, equating to around 197,000 interested individuals aged 18 domiciled in England. However, in 2022/23, there were only **45,160 apprenticeship starts** for young people (under 19) at level 3+ in England, with **only 6,670 of these being at level 4+** (3,670 of which are at level 6+). This means that for every apprenticeship start in England, there are at least 4.4 individuals interested in that opportunity.

Although not every individual interested in an apprenticeship will go on to apply, previous analysis from the Department for Education (DfE) in 2021 on the Find An Apprenticeship service found that **the ratio of overall applicants to the vacancies for those aged 25 and under was roughly three to one.**

The situation elsewhere in the UK is similar, with the number of young people interested in doing an apprenticeship being higher than the number of starts.

For each apprenticeship start in England, at least 4.4 individuals are interested in that opportunity.



⁵ UCAS, Research on behalf of *The St Martin's Group*, 2024. Calculated by the total starts from the data published by the four nations of the UK.

Table 1: Number of young people starting different levels of apprenticeship versus estimated interest

Nation	Number of interested young people	Proportion of young UCAS registrants interested in an apprenticeship	Age group included in statistics	Apprenticeship starts and level				Ratio of young people interested in apprenticeship starts
				L3	L4+	Higher Level	Other	
England	196,800	46%	<19	38,490	6,670		4.4	
Scotland	15,800	31% ⁶	16-19	7,030	220		2.2	
Wales	11,900	40%	16-19	2,850	130		4.0	
Northern Ireland	9,400	47%	16-19	2,620	280		3.2	

Table 1: Data for the most recent published year in Scotland, Northern Ireland, Wales and England, and an estimate of the number of young UCAS registrants interested in apprenticeships of equivalent age. For more information on the data points used see the technical notes.

Last year, UCAS published a report with the Sutton Trust on what influences the choices of would-be apprentices. This report highlighted a range of reasons for the gap between interest and employment. The research found that **61% of former applicants did not pursue an apprenticeship because they could not find one in their preferred location, while 35% were prevented from doing so due to a lack of roles in their desired career**⁷. It is clear that supply of apprenticeship opportunities for young people is not aligned with demand.

The full scale of individuals interested in an apprenticeship will be even higher than these estimates as not all individuals interested in an apprenticeship will register with UCAS.

Additionally, for mature applicants, who have a lower representation in UCAS engagement, the gap between interested individuals registered with UCAS and wider demand will be even higher as other organisations provide opportunities for reskilling and upskilling to fill critical skills gaps.

⁶ The lower proportion of young UCAS registrants interested in an apprenticeship in Scotland is likely related to how young people use UCAS in Scotland. In Scotland, there is a substantial section of provision, representing around a third of young full-time undergraduate study in Scotland, that is not included in UCAS' figures. It is expected the students who do not apply to full-time undergraduate study through UCAS are likely to be more interested in apprenticeships as they are mainly applying to colleges and apprenticeship interest amongst college applicants is higher than amongst University applicants.

⁷ UCAS, [What influences the choices of would-be apprentices?](#), 2023

How might this change? The widening gap between interest and apprenticeship starts

There will be **significantly more** demand for apprenticeships in 2030 than there is now.

By 2030, UCAS projects there could be up to an additional 160,000 individuals interested in an apprenticeship. This projection is based on a number of trends:

1. There will be a **16% growth** in the population of young people (aged 18 & 19) in the UK between 2023 and 2030⁸. This growth in population will likely result in a higher number of young people interested in apprenticeships.
2. This population growth will **stimulate increased demand** and competitiveness of all post-secondary education and skills routes, including apprenticeships. This is further increased through continued enhancements to careers information and promotion of apprenticeships.
3. Mature demand could be stimulated from **changing skills gaps**. The development of technology and the transition to low carbon industries will alter skills needs of employers and increase the need for re-training and upskilling later in life, increasing the demand for apprenticeships at all ages.



It is projected that by **2030**, an additional **160,000** individuals could be interested in starting an apprenticeship

For each trend, UCAS, on behalf of The St Martin's Group, modelled a scenario showing the potential impact on the current interest of **357,000** individuals domiciled in the UK:

Scenario 1: 404k (+13%) – increase in population of young people increases levels of interest

Data from the Office for National Statistics (ONS) projects a **16% growth** in the population of young people (aged 18 and 19) in the UK between 2023 and 2030.

Table 2: Forecasted population growth of 18 and 19-year-olds across the four nations⁹

Nation	Projected growth in 18-19 year old population between 2023-2030 ¹⁰
England	17%
Scotland	16%
Wales	11%
Northern Ireland	9%

In this scenario, the proportion of people interested in an apprenticeship does not change from 45% but there is inevitable growth in the volume of young people interested in an apprenticeship due to the increasing population of young people in the UK.

⁸ The population projections used in the forecasting are taken from the [2018-based national population projections](#)

⁹ ONS, [National population projections: 2018-based](#), October 2020

¹⁰ ONS, [Subnational population projects for England: 2018-based](#), March 2020

Scenario 2: Range 454k (+27%) – 510k (+43%) increased competitiveness of all post-secondary routes and increased visibility and understanding of opportunities increases interest in apprenticeships

This scenario, building on the population growth forecast, considers its impact to the competitiveness of post-secondary options on the proportion of young people interested in an apprenticeship, and estimates a **+2% increase each year from 45% of young people interested in an apprenticeship in 2023 to 52% by 2030**. This will take the total number of individuals registered with UCAS interested in an apprenticeship to 454,000 by 2030.

Previous UCAS research finds that **50% of students in Year 12 were considering an apprenticeship compared to 71% considering going to university**¹¹. With increased competitiveness amongst post-secondary options, it is possible young people will keep their options open for longer, meaning the proportion of UCAS registrants interested in an apprenticeship may align more with what we see amongst Year 12 students.

However, there is significant evidence to suggest this number could be greater, with a **4% increase in the proportion of young people interested each year rising from 45% in 2023 to 59% by 2030, taking the total UCAS registrants interested in an apprenticeship to 510,000 by 2030**¹². Amongst students in years 9-12, **59% are already considering an apprenticeship as a post-secondary option, rising to 63% for students in years 10 and 11**¹³. With the increased visibility and understanding of opportunities through improved careers information, advice and guidance, and collective efforts from employers and government to promote the apprenticeship route, students will be able to continue exploring apprenticeships alongside other post-secondary options into later years.

Scenario 3: 517k (+45%) – the increasing need for upskilling and retraining

Although mature applicants have a lower representation in UCAS engagement, estimates can be made on the proportion interested in an apprenticeship at aged 20+ (see technical notes). It is likely there will be wider demand given that apprenticeships are a route used by organisations for reskilling and upskilling to fill critical skills gaps. As set out in the Institute for the **Future of Work's 2024 report**, the UK (along with other industrial countries) is experiencing rapid technological change associated with robotics and artificial intelligence.

These changes will transform the way work is organised, how tasks are performed and what skills are needed for success¹⁴. Some sectors are declining, whilst others are transforming, growing or emerging. Workers will need to upskill and retrain to remain employed and progress in their careers. Further, the 2024 Open University Business Barometer found that **62% of organisations are currently facing skills shortages** and that apprenticeships are playing a 'vital role in workforce development'¹⁵.

In this scenario, **UCAS forecasts a 10% increase in mature demand alongside increased volume and interest from young people, resulting in an estimated increase of +45% from current demand**, an additional 160,000 individuals interested in pursuing an apprenticeship overall.

¹¹ UCAS, *Project Next Generation: Early Careers and Apprenticeships report*, 2023

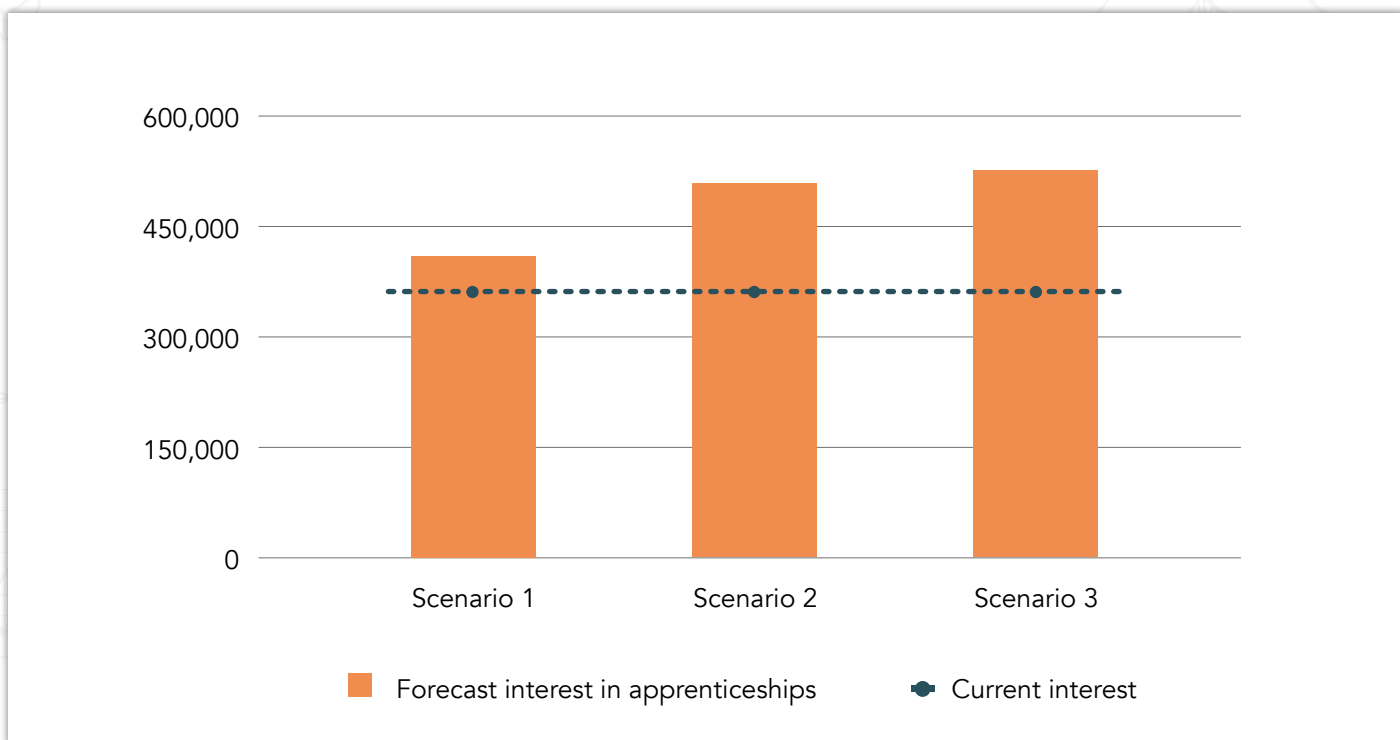
¹² Ibid

¹³ Ibid

¹⁴ Institute for the Future of Work, *Old Skills, New Skills – what is changing in the UK labour market?*, February 2024

¹⁵ Open University, *The Business Barometer 2024*, June 2024

Figure 1: Forecasted interest in apprenticeships under listed scenarios by 2030



All of these scenarios indicate building pressure on a system that is already facing high levels of demand and competition. However, as identified¹⁶ in previous UCAS research, the type of apprenticeship and location desired may not match the current supply of apprenticeships. Additionally, the increase in the volume of individuals interested in an apprenticeship will likely not be even by age or location. Therefore, the pressure will be felt much more acutely in certain levels and industries for apprenticeships than in others.

Challenges for demand and supply: higher levels, geography, sectors and demographics

Demand vs supply at level 4 and above

Overall, the number of starts for higher and degree apprenticeships (or equivalent in Wales, NI and Scotland) is lower than the number of interested individuals. Of those young UCAS registrants interested in an apprenticeship, **88% are most interested in an apprenticeship at level 4+, with 38% most interested in levels 6 and above, 10% interested in level 4 and 5, and 40% interested in exploring either degree apprenticeships or higher apprenticeships.** However, starts amongst young people are much lower for apprenticeships at level 4 and above than at level 3 (and equivalent) across all nations (see Table 1).

In England, there are over **170,000 young people interested in apprenticeships at level 4 and above compared to only 6,700 starts.** Thus, for every start in a level 4+ apprenticeship, there are about 26 young people in England interested in that opportunity- a much higher gap when compared to the overall statistic of 4.4 English young people interested in each apprenticeship start. Under growth scenario 2, **this pressure could increase with almost 40 young people interested in each one apprenticeship start.**

For each apprenticeship start in England at level 4 or equivalent, around 26 young people are interested.

¹⁶ UCAS, *Where next? What influences the choices of would-be apprentices?*, July 2023

Demand vs supply at a sector level

The gap between demand and supply of apprenticeships exists at a sector level as well. **Figure 2** shows the ratio of individuals in England interested in an apprenticeship for each sector against the number of starts at level 3+.

Figure 2: The ratio of individuals interested to apprenticeship starts in England by sector

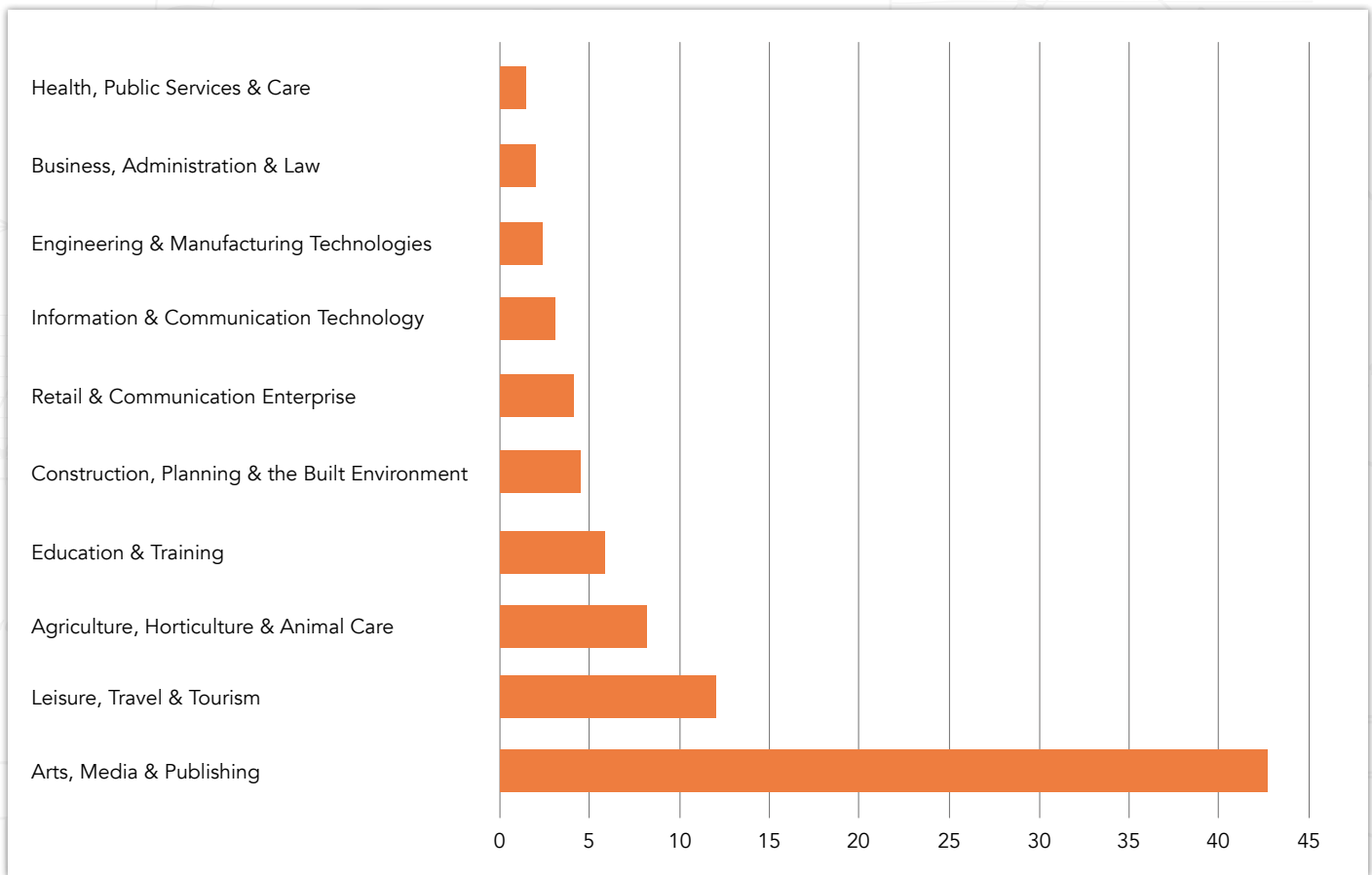
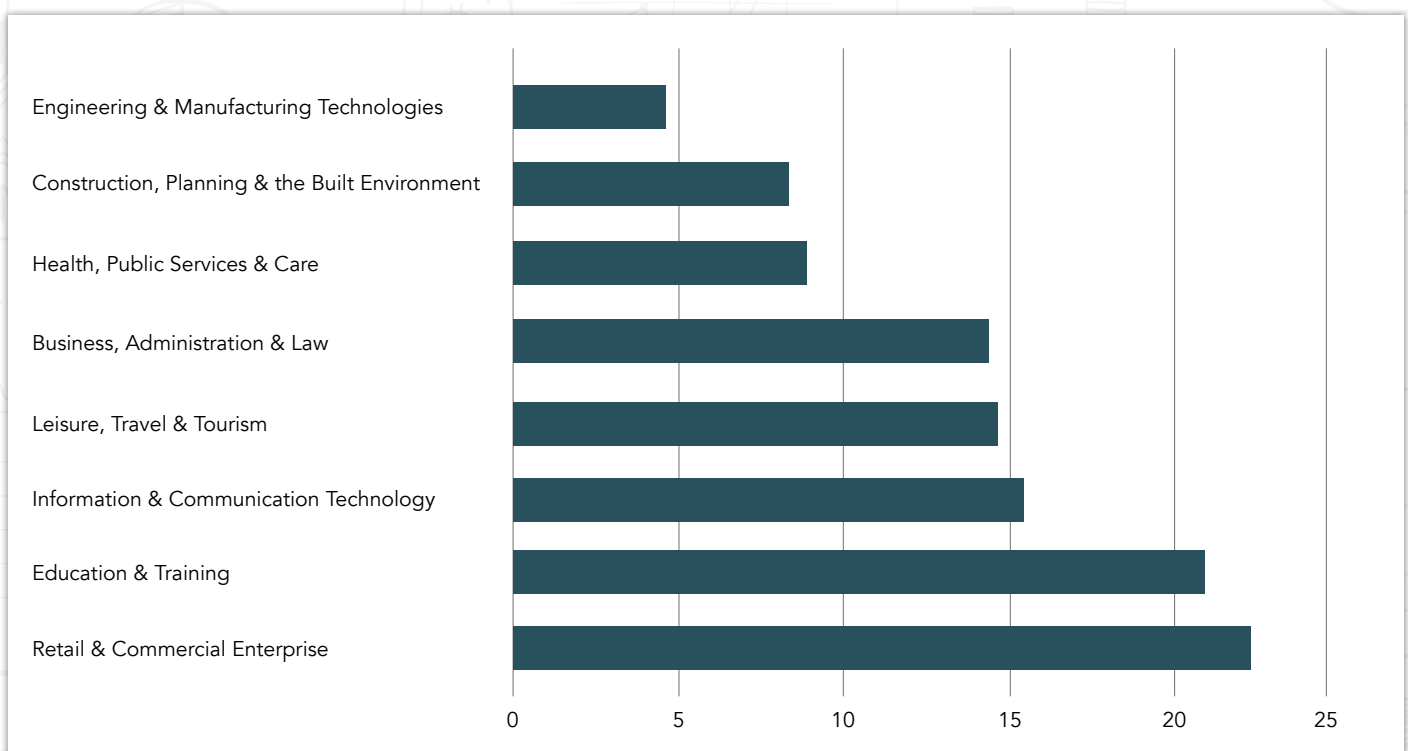


Figure 3: The ratio of young individuals interested to apprenticeship starts in England by sector



As previously shown and detailed in Figure 3, there is a **higher ratio of interest to starts amongst young people than in the wider population**. Due to the different interests of young people and the number of apprenticeship starts by sector, the sectors facing the most pressure in terms of demand are different.

The difference between the interests of young people and interests of all ages mirror what UCAS sees in undergraduate Higher Education applications. UCAS End of Cycle data¹⁷ shows young people are **less likely to apply to undergraduate subjects associated with Health, Public Services and Care, and Education and Training** than mature individuals, and are **more likely to apply to subjects related to Business, Administration and Law, and Engineering and Manufacturing Technologies**¹⁸.

Under scenario 2, the **forecasted ratio of interested individuals and interested young people by 2030 increase on average by 53% and 46% respectively** across all sectors.

Demand vs supply by region

Currently, the ratio of young people interested to starts is higher in England than in Wales, Scotland, and Northern Ireland (see Table 1). Additionally, higher growth is expected in the 18 and 19-year-old population demographic in England compared to the other three nations (see Table 2). Therefore, the growth stimulated by this population demographic will have the most impact in England, building pressure in a region where a disproportionate gap exists already.

Within this, there is a varied spread of apprenticeship interest and/or apprenticeship starts **regionally across England**, so the ratio of interested young people to starts is not equal around the different regions of England.

London has one of the highest interest rates in apprenticeships in England. However, the number of starts is lower in London than in regions with much smaller populations and lower interest in apprenticeships. Consequently, we see **9.6 times as many young people interested in an apprenticeship in London for each start**. Conversely, the ratio of young people interested in an apprenticeship in the North East to the number of young people who start one is much lower, with 3.0 times as many young people interested in an apprenticeship for each start.

The high proportion of interest to starts in London relative to the North East could be related to the different choices and opportunities for young people in these regions. London sees the lowest proportion of young people starting an apprenticeship at level 3+ of all regions in England (1.1%) but sees the highest proportion of young people entering higher education (49.7%). **Meanwhile, in the North East, 3.3% of young people start an apprenticeship, but only 29.7% of 18 year olds enter higher education.**

Previous UCAS research shows that the most common reason for young people who were previously interested in an apprenticeship not to pursue one, is that they decided they only wanted to apply to university¹⁹. However, as entry to higher education becomes increasingly competitive, the lower supply of apprenticeship opportunities in London may mean individuals interested in both routes are left with fewer options.

35% of former UCAS applicants were prevented from pursuing an apprenticeship due to the lack of roles in their desired field.

61% of former applicants did not pursue an apprenticeship because they could not find one in their preferred location.

Additionally, the population growth amongst young people in the English regions will likely not be uniform. For example, **the 18-year-old population in the East Midlands is projected to grow by 19%, while in Yorkshire and the Humber it is due to grow by 14%**. This means the pressure faced in the East Midlands will grow disproportionately over the next few years compared to other regions. However, the differences in population growth are not sufficient to change the areas facing the lowest numbers of apprenticeship starts.

Table 3: The number of 18-year-old individuals in each region of England interested in an apprenticeship, the number of starts (aged under 19), and the forecasted population growth for 18-year-olds in each region

Region	Apprentice starts L3+ and above (<19 yo)	Proportion of young people interested in an app'ship	Total interested now (<19 yo)	Ratio of young people interested to starts	Forecasted ratio of young people interested to starts in 2030 under scenario 2	Population growth in 18 year olds 2023-2030	Entry rate to HE at age 18 2023	Entry rate to L3+ apprenticeships by age 18 2022/23
East Midlands	4,530	48%	17,400	3.8	6.0	19%	33.9%	2.7%
East of England	4,720	48%	21,800	4.6	7.2	18%	35.7%	2.2%
London	3,410	50%	32,600	9.6	14.7	17%	49.7%	1.1%
North East	2,930	45%	8,600	3.0	4.4	14%	29.7%	3.3%
North West	7,460	46%	25,400	3.4	5.2	15%	33.8%	2.9%
South East	6,390	44%	30,900	4.8	7.5	17%	38.2%	2.0%
South West	4,810	44%	18,000	3.7	5.8	19%	30.2%	2.6%
West Midlands	5,250	50%	23,700	4.5	6.8	15%	34.2%	2.4%
Yorkshire & The Humber	5,290	43%	18,200	3.4	5.2	14%	32.1%	2.7%

¹⁷ UCAS *End of Cycle data*, 2023

¹⁸ Where there was no direct link between apprenticeship sectors and HE undergraduate degree subjects, the most similar HECoS groups to each sector area were analysed: Subjects allied to Medicine taken to be most similar to Health, Public Services and Care, Business and Management used for Business, Administration and Law, and Engineering and Technology for Engineering and Manufacturing Technologies.

¹⁹ UCAS, *Where next? What influences the choices of would-be apprentices?*, July 2023

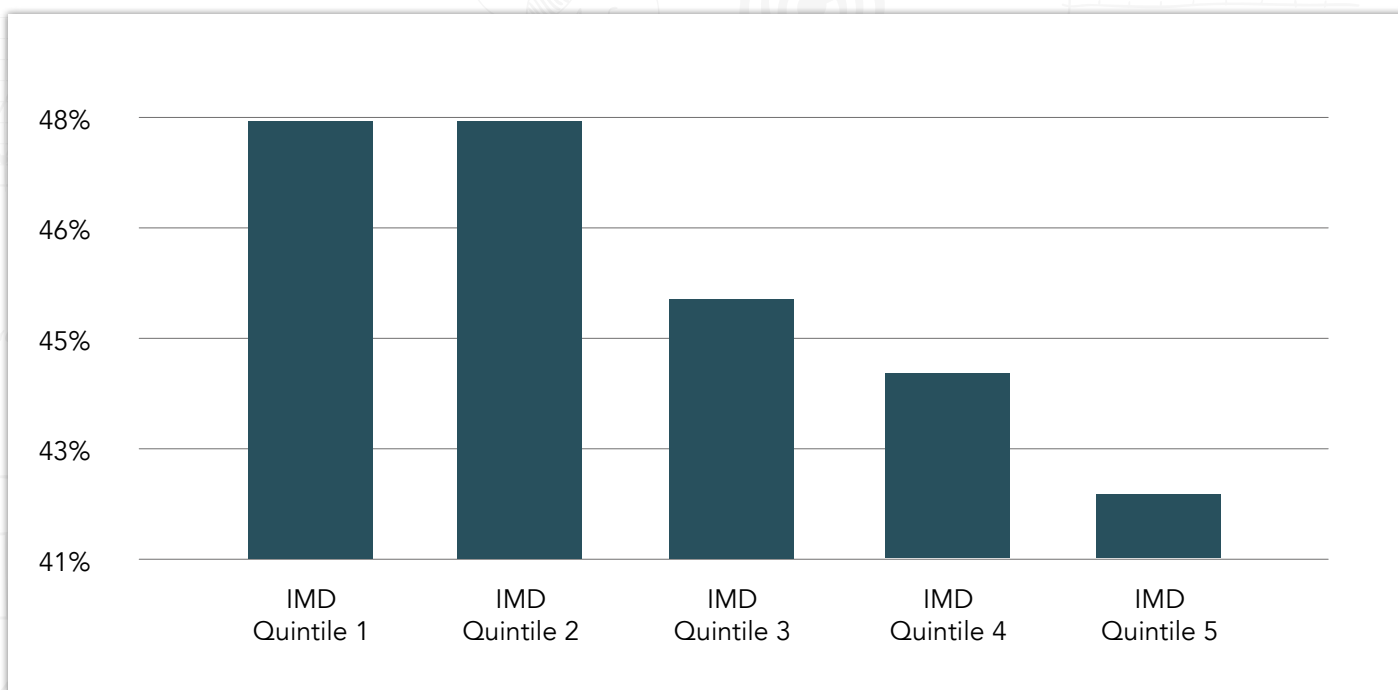
Demand vs supply by demographic

Using the data collected from those registered with the UCAS Hub, analysis shows the interest in apprenticeships of individuals from different backgrounds. It also presents evidence, where possible, of how it compares against the opportunities available.

Measures of Disadvantage

Previous UCAS research with the Sutton Trust suggests that individuals from disadvantaged backgrounds are more likely to be interested in apprenticeship opportunities. When looking at the pool of students that have registered an interest in the apprenticeship opportunities, individuals from the most disadvantaged areas in Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) quintile, 1, **48% are more interested in an apprenticeship than registrants from the least disadvantaged areas (IMD Q5) at 42%.**

Figure 4: Proportion of young people interested in apprenticeship by levels of disadvantage



However, interest from these groups does not translate to starts. Research published by the Social Mobility Commission in 2020 found that workers from disadvantaged backgrounds are being left behind by the apprenticeship system. **Since the introduction of the Apprenticeship Levy, there has been a 36% decline in apprenticeship starts by people from disadvantaged backgrounds**, compared with 23% for others²⁰. The research also finds that apprenticeships are one of the most effective means of boosting social mobility for workers from poorer backgrounds – if they can get into the system²¹. Not only are individuals from disadvantaged groups more likely to express an interest in undertaking an apprenticeship, but actually doing an apprenticeship is one of the most effective means of boosting social mobility²².

Previous research undertaken by UCAS and the Sutton Trust found that some disadvantaged groups are disproportionately underrepresented in higher level apprenticeships. This is despite, according to 2022/23 Department for Education data, having a higher representation in level 2 and below²³.

²⁰ Social Mobility Commission, *Apprenticeship system failing people from disadvantaged backgrounds*, June 2020

²¹ Ibid

²² UCAS research on behalf of *The St Martins Group*, 2024

²³ UCAS, *Three in five do not pursue apprenticeships because they cannot find one, say UCAS and Sutton Trust*, July 2023

Ethnicity

Data released by DfE on apprenticeship starts demonstrates that Asian, Black, and mixed heritage people are significantly underrepresented in apprenticeships, accounting for only 13.6% of apprenticeship starts, less than proportionate to the population²⁴.

The challenges for individuals from ethnic minorities in accessing apprenticeships are multi-faceted. Research by Sutton Trust found that ethnic minorities are most under-represented for younger age groups and slightly over-represented among older age groups, whereas the opposite is true for White British²⁵. Many ethnic minority young people are also not aware of where to find information about apprenticeships²⁶.

Rurality and travel

UCAS data finds that **young people from rural England are less likely (43%) to be interested in an apprenticeship than those from urban areas (46%)**.

This is particularly pertinent as previous UCAS research found that **61% of former applicants did not pursue an apprenticeship because they could not find one in their preferred location**²⁷.

Care experience

Previous UCAS research on care experiences students found that gaps in careers information, advice and guidance (CIAG) might be more pronounced for this group, and they may lack specific knowledge about the support available to them. 45% of care-experienced students felt unsupported with information about apprenticeships by their Personal Adviser²⁸.



²⁴ FE Week, [Apprenticeships diversity still lags and now is the time to act](#), February 2023

²⁵ The Sutton Trust, [The recent evolution of Apprenticeships](#), December 2022

²⁶ BTEG, [Ethnic minority young people and apprenticeships in England](#)

²⁷ UCAS, [What influences the choices of would-be apprentices?](#), 2023

²⁸ UCAS, [What is the experience of students from a care background in education?](#)

What barriers must be overcome to increase the supply of apprenticeships in the UK?

As UCAS data shows, there is strong demand for apprenticeship opportunities, and this is likely to grow over the remainder of the decade as we see an increasing population, improvements in information and awareness and a greater number of mature workers seeking reskilling and upskilling.

In the scenarios above, supply is assumed to remain at current levels. However, current demand already outstrips supply and with pending reforms in apprenticeships, there is a risk supply may reduce. There is a need to stimulate growth, unlocking opportunities for those who wish to pursue this pathway.

To understand how this can be achieved, the St Martin's Group convened representatives from over 65 organisations between January and March of this year.

The organisations included employers, training providers, awarding organisations, government representatives, sector bodies and charities from industries including retail, technology, construction, finance, logistics, healthcare, manufacturing, hospitality and energy. The findings from these discussions have been analysed thematically to draw out commonalities.

Employer challenges in creating sufficient opportunities

The need to make the case for investment

While it was acknowledged that apprenticeships deliver good outcomes for both apprentices and employers, not all employers see apprenticeships as a key part of their talent development. Some find it hard to make the case to senior decisionmakers, especially with additional costs for administering and managing apprenticeship programmes and would welcome more shared evidence on the productivity and business outcomes for apprenticeships.

Low understanding of how to navigate the system

The current apprenticeship system and funding model is seen as overly complex and often misunderstood, deterring employers from engaging. Many representatives acknowledged that efforts were underway across government and the careers and skills sector to rectify this but accessible and simplified information, especially for those operating across all four UK nations, was needed, together with more sector-specific guidance, best practices and lessons learned from relevant employers.

SMEs face specific barriers

SMEs were identified as important to unlocking supply, but they have less resource and capacity to engage with the system than larger employers. From a hiring perspective, they have less visibility and brand recognition when seeking to recruit apprentices and therefore fewer applicants to job adverts, plus less flexibility in start dates due to an immediate need for resource. Support required for managing apprentices was also raised, particularly as SMEs typically recruit younger people, those from underrepresented communities and locally. Representatives did not believe that removal of co-investment funding would make a material difference but the possibility of a funded, intermediary service to source apprentices and provide on-going support could. There were also suggestions that large businesses could funnel applicants for oversubscribed vacancies to SMEs in their supply chain.

Representatives convened from over
65 organisations

Organisations included

Employers

Training providers

Awarding organisations

Government representatives

Sector bodies

Charities

Challenges faced by training providers

Funding

Representatives cited a lack of adequate investment, which hinders training providers' ability to support more apprentices. Providers were seen to be scaling back due to low funding rates and there was a call for fair and transparent funding that reflects the real costs of delivery. Some providers face unique challenges such as Independent Training Providers, which form a significant portion of providers but lack access to capital funding which is challenging for delivery of capital-intensive apprenticeships like engineering. Also, it is often not financially viable for training providers to support small numbers of apprentices, impacting specialist providers and those supporting SMEs. Aggregating demand could help support SMEs and give providers the confidence to deliver training.

Recruitment and retention of workforce

The recruitment and retention of staff to support the delivery of provision for apprentices was also cited as a challenge for training providers. Discussions highlighted that there are shortages of skilled professionals willing to step away from their sector to move into teaching, with salary cited as a challenge in attracting people to the sector. Challenges were said to be especially acute in shortage sectors, for example, digital, construction, and engineering, where salaries far outweigh what they could attract as a teacher or lecturer.

The timing of apprentice recruitment

Representatives raised the variable nature of employer demand for training as creating challenges for providers who sometimes find it difficult to onboard mid-year or who are less flexible in timings for delivery of training. Additionally, it was noted that the academic cycle shapes how many young people view their next steps. Recruitment timings for apprenticeship opportunities may be too early in the year for the CIAG support decision-making process for school or college leavers.

The current system

Flexibilities

The introduction of flexibilities to parts of the current system was identified as a solution to overcoming barriers to growth. These included the 12-month minimum duration rule where prior learning prevents some learners from accessing apprenticeships, off-the-job training, the requirement for maths and English testing for achievement, rigidity of programme design and complexity of end-point assessment.

Responsiveness

Representatives expressed the need for the apprenticeship system to align with the UK's overarching skills needs and adapt to emerging skill shortages with a comprehensive, all-age skills strategy. It was suggested that a holistic, cross-departmental plan from government was needed to ensure the apprenticeship system meets national skills requirements. It was noted that greater co-ordination could reduce regulatory burdens. Additionally, it was highlighted that the process for new and revised apprenticeship standards needs to be more agile. The pandemic's responsive approach was praised as something to learn and reflect from.

Geographical challenges

Insufficient levels of collaboration between employers, training providers, and local authorities were highlighted in roundtable discussions as a challenge to be addressed. Local Skills Improvement Plans (LSIPs) in England – which bring together employer representative bodies education and training providers – were felt to have unmet potential in delivering the necessary coordination needed to match supply and demand. Representatives cited difficulties in engaging across geographies, especially for UK-wide organisations; different funding mechanisms, accountability measures, regulations, and apprenticeships standards/frameworks act as a barrier to growth and prevent employers from delivering consistency for their workforce. Representatives highlighted the need for devolved areas to work more closely together.

How do we ensure that individuals from the most disadvantaged background can access apprenticeship opportunities?

As noted earlier in the report, individuals from disadvantaged backgrounds have shown greater interest in apprenticeship opportunities, but in many cases are less likely to undertake one.

Representatives convened earlier this year debated how disadvantaged individuals can be better supported to progress to, and through apprenticeship pathways. Again, the findings from these discussions have been analysed thematically to draw out commonalities.

Enhanced Careers Information, Advice and Guidance (CIAG)

Representatives raised that businesses and third sector organisations find it difficult to engage with schools due to limited capacity for organising external talks and job fairs, and that efforts should be made to raise awareness of apprenticeship opportunities from teachers, who themselves are more likely to be university educated.

It was noted that the word 'degree' in degree apprenticeships was helping to bridge the current gap in prestige between undergraduate courses and apprenticeships. It was suggested that this was especially helpful for parents and carers, to help them see the value in degree apprenticeships as being equal to full-time higher education. However, some posed the question about how similar initiatives could be delivered to enhance the perception of lower-level apprenticeships which should not be seen as a sideways step or a step backwards, but instead as a positive choice to reach certain professions.

For SMEs where apprenticeships often go undersubscribed, there was a call for more place-based careers advice to highlight local opportunities.

Collecting better data to understand challenges faced by disadvantaged groups

Discussions highlighted a need to support employers with knowledge and resources to embed strategies and practices for employing apprentices from diverse backgrounds. Sharing good practice and accessible toolkits would help them in taking steps to promote fair access and to support apprentices to progress from lower-level apprenticeships, which were seen to perform relatively well in supporting those from disadvantaged backgrounds to higher levels where there is currently not enough movement. Further, evidence of positive business outcomes from diverse hiring should be more widely promoted.

Facilitating greater geographic mobility

In addition to generating local and regional opportunities, discussions with representatives highlighted the benefit of enhancing mobility for apprentices so they have the means to move or travel to suit their chosen career. Funding dedicated to supporting the relocation or travel of those from disadvantaged backgrounds, the promotion of young-professional accommodation and the development of maintenance loans to meet living costs were raised as potential solutions.

Boosting work experience and work readiness

Work readiness was highlighted by representatives as a challenge in recruiting and supporting apprentices; understanding work culture and ways of working were identified as elements for development for many apprentices. Reference was made to the pandemic which had contributed to the lack of opportunities for young people to develop the essential skills they need for work, especially disadvantaged young people, with most seeing work experience as transformational.

Fair access to work experience was highlighted as a barrier to everyone having opportunities. Many said that those from more advantaged backgrounds can more easily access work experience opportunities as they often have networks to draw on and more family support for unpaid work.

Pre-work and pre-apprenticeship programmes exist but more should be done to simplify routes to work and showcase availability. Online work experience was highlighted as a development that is creating more accessible opportunities for work experience, especially for those from rural areas.

It was noted that hosting work experience placements can carry significant costs. Clear guidance of best practice of how to conduct work experience, especially for smaller organisations, was an area identified as needing further attention.

Expanding outreach work

The positive impact of outreach work was praised. However, discussions identified that more progress is needed. Outreach work often starts too late in the career discovery journey for young people. Parents and carers were identified as a key group that should be supported in outreach work, notably to challenge misconceptions about apprenticeships based on an outdated understanding of their structure and scope across different career pathways. The diversity of apprenticeship role models was highlighted as an area to continue to improve, and the work of the Diversity Champions Network was seen as being impactful.

Representatives also commented on improving support during the application process with more mentoring and coaching required for disadvantaged young people, and a more standardised and accessible application process where students can apply for multiple opportunities in one place.



Part 2 - Unlocking Supply

The findings from the analysis undertaken by UCAS on behalf of The St Martin's Group indicate **demand for apprenticeships is high and likely to grow, those from disadvantaged backgrounds are particularly impacted, and employers need support to unlock supply.**

As the skills landscape looks set to change with the introduction of Skills England, the youth guarantee and reforms to the Apprenticeship Levy, we have the opportunity to build on parts of the system which work well and transform those that do not, supporting the new Labour Government in its mission to break down barriers to opportunity.

While The St Martin's Group supports proposals for a Growth and Skills Levy that enables employers to make greater use of the levy to spend on training for their workforce, it strongly advocates for the protection of apprenticeships to meet increased demand from all ages, not just young people.

As we address the decline in young people's participation, we must avoid imposing restrictions on older individuals' opportunities for apprenticeships. Limiting employer choices on how they can develop their workforce will be counterproductive, not least because it reduces opportunities for younger entrants. Mature learners who are unable to progress remain in their positions, leaving fewer opportunities.

So, how can we stimulate growth within the apprenticeship system to enable all learners who are interested in apprenticeships, to undertake a high-quality programme which will provide them with the skills needed to succeed in the economy of the future?

The St Martin's Group members, together with its wider network of employers, providers and awarding organisations have identified five areas for the new Government to consider:

- **Making the system more flexible**
- **The Apprenticeship Budget**
- **Incentivising SME uptake of apprentices**
- **Improving support for disadvantaged learners**
- **Opportunities for reform**

1. Making the system more flexible

- Apprenticeship reforms have been successful - notably increasing employer engagement and improving the apprenticeship brand. They provide a high-quality route to skills training and jobs and have opened opportunities to a diverse range of people, driving higher levels of social mobility. We should seek to build on this, maintaining parts of the system that work and transforming those that could work better.
- There are aspects of the current system that are complex, costly and are barriers to supply, particularly in programme design and funding rules. Addressing these areas could release funds and should be prioritised to stimulate growth, especially for SMEs. The St Martin's Group is calling for a review of these elements alongside the proposals for the new Growth and Skills Levy:
 - Recognising prior attainment as contributing to the 12-month practical period so that accessing work and skills is easier at entry level where the apprenticeship is the most valuable route and including end-point assessment within the 12 months where the apprentice is ready.

- Developing modular, stackable training for choice and flexibility and allowing employers to decide on 20% of the programme content to meet specific needs. SME participation could be increased by broadening apprenticeship standards in this way for multi-skilling, specialisms or critical/future skills.
- Removing the requirement to pass maths and English tests as a pre-requisite for gateway in an apprenticeship standard unless it is fundamentally important to achievement of occupational competence. While development of functional skills should still form part of learning, for some apprentices the tests are a barrier, and despite being occupationally competent, they are unable to achieve their apprenticeship. This requirement also leads some employers to stipulate minimum entry levels which can act as a barrier to participation, especially for those from disadvantaged backgrounds. Apprenticeships should be aligned to other educational routes such as T-Levels and A 'Levels which do not require this.
- Allowing off-the-job training to be determined by employer requirements.
- Simplifying and streamlining current end-point assessment requirements.



Only half of all young people from disadvantaged backgrounds (as measured by eligibility for free school meals) achieved the required grades in the last academic year to participate in an apprenticeship¹⁹.

2. The Apprenticeship Budget

- The apprenticeship budget **underspent by £17 million in 2023-24, equating to 1% of the £2.529 billion available**²⁹. Without additional funds, delivering more qualifications and training under the proposed Growth and Skills Levy will reduce the number of apprenticeship opportunities available and risk efforts to further SME participation.
- Figures from HM Treasury show that **£3.58 billion was raised by the levy in 2022-23. However, only £2.5 billion was handed to the DfE to spend on apprenticeships in England**, with an estimated £608 million allocated to the devolved nations³⁰. This leaves £418 million of funds raised through the levy unallocated and returned to HM Treasury³¹.
- The Office for Budget Responsibility (OBR) forecasts that cash raised by the levy is set to surpass previous expectations and hit £4 billion by 2024-25. This is **£300 million higher than first anticipated and means around £800 million could be returned to Treasury**³².
- The St Martin's Group calls for all levy funds collected to be used for skills and a protected apprenticeship budget. The budget should be sufficient to uplift apprenticeship standards funding to reflect inflationary increases and the real cost of delivery. Incentivisation should be used to encourage participation in critical areas rather than placing restrictions on spend.



Cash raised by the Apprenticeship Levy is set to **surpass previous expectations and hit £4bn by 2024-25.**

²⁹ Department for Education, *Consolidated annual report and accounts*, 2023/24

³⁰ Baroness Barran, *Written Answer*, May 2024

³¹ FE Week, *Apprenticeship levy turns into Treasury 'cash cow'*, September 2023

³² FE Week, *OBR forecast hikes apprenticeship levy intake to £4bn next year*, November 2023

3. Incentivising SME uptake of apprentices

- SMEs will be key to unlocking the supply of UK apprenticeships to meet increased demand.
- This means we have to address the particular challenges faced by smaller businesses in engaging effectively with the apprenticeship system. **SMEs make up around 60% of employment in the UK, and account for 99.9% of the business population, yet 90% of SMEs have not engaged with apprenticeships at all**, and of those who have participated, starts have declined in comparison to large businesses³³. **Starts for non-levy paying businesses dropped 13% from 124,980 in 2021-22 to 108,660 in 2022-23**³⁴.
- SMEs often require further support to help them take on apprentices. The previous Government's announcement that it would fully fund training for apprentices in small business from 1 April 2024 up to the age of 21 was a welcome one, however, this should be extended to all age cohorts.
- Apprenticeship incentives have a significant impact on starts. During the Covid-19 pandemic, the Government introduced a cash bonus scheme to encourage the hiring of apprentices, with a £3,000 payment per hire in England, regardless of the apprentice's age. **This led to a 21% surge in apprenticeship starts during this period**, but once this was reduced back to £1,000 for under 19s and care leavers only, starts dropped by 12%³⁵. The St Martin's Group calls for the reintroduction of financial incentives targeted at SMEs to support the additional costs of hiring and managing apprentices.
- Intermediaries are recognised as a useful support for SMEs in hiring and managing apprentices. Funding for localised support could be effective here but a review of training provision itself should also be considered. Many providers face higher costs in delivering to SMEs and incentivising them through a **20% uplift of apprenticeship funding bands** for SMEs could increase participation and unlock supply.



According to the London School of Economics and the Federation of Small Businesses, SME's make up around **60% of employment in the UK. Of those, 90% of SME's have not engaged with apprenticeships at all.**

4. Supporting disadvantaged learners

- Evidence shows the **interest in apprenticeships from disadvantaged individuals far outweighs the number who start an apprenticeship**, particularly at higher levels and is disproportionate to their less disadvantaged peers.
- To address this and widen participation, **a review of financial measures to help disadvantaged learners with fair access is required**. This could include the development of maintenance loans, akin to those which exist in the higher education system to support with living costs, support for travel expenses to and from work and the promotion of young-professional accommodation. Visibility of existing financial support could be improved through a central information hub such as the gov.uk site.
- Additionally, the impact of taking up an apprenticeship on household benefits, notably universal credit, child benefit, and council tax should be assessed, with a view to removing disincentives for becoming an apprentice.
- It is clear from the roundtable discussions that **employers want to help individuals from diverse backgrounds to access apprenticeships but need support with resources** to embed practices for employing and progressing apprentices. This should include sharing good practice and evidence of positive business outcomes from diverse hiring. In return, levy-paying employers could report on their performance. National data on the socio-economic backgrounds of individuals applying for apprenticeships could also provide an opportunity to track progress.

³³ Association of Colleges & London Economics, *Investigating the impact of the Apprenticeship Levy on training outcomes*, January 2024

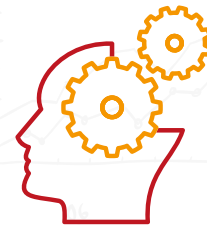
³⁴ FE Week, *Dwindling SME starts drag down apprenticeship figures in 2022-23*, October 2023

³⁵ FSB, *Small firms lead calls for £3,000 apprenticeship incentive for under 25s and SMEs*, February 2023

- The proposed **Growth and Skills Levy could offer additional pathways leading to apprenticeships** and linked to occupational standards, to support individuals as they start employment, helping to widen participation. However, this should not replace pre-work programmes for individuals not in employment. Here, further communication of training and funding available is needed for both employers and learners.

5. Opportunities for reform

- Skills and labour shortages continue to impact employers across all four nations and regions of the UK, and virtually all sectors. **Around 22% of small businesses cannot expand because they are unable to source the skilled workers they require³⁶**, yet there is huge demand for apprenticeships that cannot be met.
- The proposed skills reforms represent both a risk and an opportunity for the supply of apprenticeships.
- The flexibilities afforded by the proposed Growth and Skills Levy could see a reduction in the number of apprenticeships offered by employers who opt for alternative training pathways for their workforce. Proposed flexibilities for the inclusion of new programmes should be widely consulted on and implementation of changes phased to assess the impact on supply of apprenticeships. Parts of the current system which work well for employers should be maintained such as the design of employer-led occupational and apprenticeship standards.
- However, **the reforms represent an opportunity to transform parts of the system that do not work as well as they could**, and this could help to unlock supply of apprenticeships.
- Skills England, for example, could drive greater cohesion and simplicity on policy across government departments with mandates for education, jobs, skills, levelling up and productivity. Greater cohesion among relevant bodies in the skills sector could reduce regulatory complexity and duplication, allowing those who deliver apprenticeships to concentrate on innovation and quality.
- Greater alignment with devolved regions under a national framework, reflective of local needs and empowering local/regional decisions but underpinned by national priorities, would create the certainty, consistency and simplicity that employers need to invest. **The St Martin's Group would also welcome further collaboration to bring all four UK nations together on skills policy.**
- Skills England's plans to convene a wider range of stakeholders from across the system should ensure equal representation from those who create supply and those who deliver it, including employers, providers and awarding organisations.
- Skills England should manage data and insight relating to skills gaps and shortages, providing central co-ordination and reporting, ensuring the system is aligned to these needs and able to respond effectively. This should incorporate improved return on investment (ROI) reporting on skills and apprenticeships for public communication.



22% of small businesses cannot expand because they are unable to source the skilled workers they need.

³⁶ FSB, [Skills gap is stifling our growth ambitions and leaving us at a standstill, say firms](#), November 2023

Call to Action

1. **Guarantee all levy funds collected are used for skills and a protected apprenticeship budget.**
2. **Reflect inflationary increases and the real cost of delivery in apprenticeship funding bands.**
3. **Re-introduce financial incentives for SMEs hiring apprentices.**
4. **Remove co-investment costs for non-levy employers for all age groups.**
5. **Introduce a 20% uplift in apprenticeship funding bands for SME employers.**
6. **Introduce flexibilities within the current apprenticeship system for programme design.**
7. **Review financial support for disadvantaged apprentices and assess the impact of taking up an apprenticeship on welfare benefits and council tax.**
8. **Simplify and create better visibility of pre-work and pre-apprenticeship programmes available.**
9. **Align policy across central government departments with a mandate for skills.**
10. **Consult employers, providers and awarding organisations who use the system widely, ahead of and throughout reform.**



Technical Notes

The data used throughout this report is taken from the UCAS.com registrant database for the 2023 application year and UCAS undergraduate application data for the 2023 cycle. Alongside this, UCAS has used official statistics on apprenticeship starts published by the devolved administrations.

Estimating interest in apprenticeships

When individuals register on the UCAS Hub (or attend a UCAS exhibition) they are asked whether they are interested in information on apprenticeships. It is this question that UCAS uses as an indication the individual in the registrant database is interested in an apprenticeship.

UCAS have domicile information for most individuals in the registrant database. However, in 2023 only 16% of UK individuals had recorded their age in the registrant database, and this is mainly recorded for younger individuals. Consequently, UCAS can estimate what proportion of young people (aged 18 and 19) are interested in an apprenticeship, but it has had to use other data to estimate the total number of young people in the registrant data. To do this, UCAS assumes the age distribution of the registrant data is equivalent to the age distribution of undergraduate application data from the same year. This means, of the 914,000 UK individuals in the database, UCAS estimates 69% (631,000) to be aged 18 or 19. UCAS also knows 45% of young registrants are interested in an apprenticeship meaning that of everyone interested in an apprenticeship, around 285,000 are young people, and the remainder (70,000) are aged 20+. UCAS can apply similar logic to get the total number of young people in each country interested in an apprenticeship, and to split the group of young registrants into those aged 18 and under and those aged 19.

Forecasting interest in apprenticeships

With an estimate of the total young people interested in an apprenticeship in each of the four devolved nations, UCAS has used the population projections for 18 and 19-year-olds in the four UK nations to forecast growth in volume of young people interested in apprenticeships to 2030³⁷. Additionally, UCAS can apply scenarios relating to the proportion of young people, and the number of mature people, interested in an apprenticeship.

Apprenticeship starts

UCAS has sourced data on apprenticeship starts from official statistics for the four devolved nations. UCAS has used the most recently published full year of data on apprenticeship starts. For England and Wales this is 2022-23 and for Scotland and Northern Ireland it is 2021-22. UCAS acknowledges that particularly for Scotland and Northern Ireland, comparing the starts in 2021-22 to the number of interested individuals in 2023 is not ideal. However, it does not expect this to greatly impact the analysis as it sees similar number of individuals interested in an apprenticeship in the 2022 registrant data. UCAS uses start data for apprenticeships at level 3 and above (or equivalent).

The start data UCAS has used can be found at the following links:

- **England:** <https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/apprenticeships-and-traineeships>
- **Wales:** <https://statswales.gov.wales/Catalogue/Education-and-Skills/Post-16-Education-and-Training/Further-Education-and-Work-Based-Learning/Lifelong-Learning-Wales-Record/learningprogrammestarts-in-workbasedlearning>
- **Scotland Modern apprenticeships:** <https://www.skillsdevelopmentscotland.co.uk/publications-statistics/statistics/modern-apprenticeships>
- **Scotland Graduate apprenticeships:** <https://www.skillsdevelopmentscotland.co.uk/publications-statistics/statistics/graduate-apprenticeships>

³⁷ ONS, *National Population Projections*, 2019

- **Northern Ireland level 3 apprenticeships:** <https://www.skillsdevelopmentscotland.co.uk/publications-statistics/statistics/graduate-apprenticeships>
- **Northern Ireland Higher level apprenticeships:** <https://www.skillsdevelopmentscotland.co.uk/publications-statistics/statistics/graduate-apprenticeships>

Sector and Level Interest

Individuals who are particularly interested in hearing about apprenticeship opportunities in the UCAS Hub can fill in information about the type of apprenticeship they might be interested in to receive smart alerts about apprenticeship opportunities that align with their interests³⁸. To estimate interest in each level of apprenticeships for young people in England, UCAS has applied the proportion of young people who it has identified as being interested in each apprenticeship level to the total number of young people it estimates as being interested in an apprenticeship in England. UCAS has taken a similar approach to estimate the total number interested in each sector. Note that individuals can select multiple sectors and levels meaning if you sum the number of individuals interested in all different apprenticeship sectors or levels it will be higher than the total number of individuals interested in an apprenticeship.

Regional interest

As mentioned previously, UCAS only has age data for 16% of UK individuals in the registrant database. Additionally, the proportion of individuals who fill in age data is slightly uneven across regions. This is because often age data is supplied at exhibitions, and the number of individuals who attend UCAS exhibitions is not uniform around the country. Consequently, to estimate the number of young people in each region in the registrant data UCAS cannot use the number of people in each region it identifies as young. Additionally, taking the regional distribution from the application data did not feel reliable given UCAS knows entry rates to HE to be very different in different regions.

Instead, UCAS took the 631,000 estimated young people in the registrant database and distributed them into regions according to the total number of young people in each area. UCAS was then able to apply the proportion of young people in each region interested in an apprenticeship to these totals.

Interest by characteristics

An individual's address and gender are recorded in the registrant database allowing UCAS to calculate the proportion of people interested in an apprenticeship in each IMD quintile, by rurality and for each gender.

Figure Rounding

Percentages have been rounded to include no decimal places, apprenticeship starts to the nearest 10 individuals, the estimates of total UCAS registrants interested in an apprenticeship to the nearest 100, and the scenarios of future interest to the nearest 1000.

³⁸ UCAS, [Smart Alerts](#)

About



The St Martin's Group is a unique membership organisation created to support the UK economy by fostering a sustainable, quality-focused and employer-led apprenticeship and skills system.

Launched in 2018, the Group brings together stakeholders from some of the UK's leading employers, training providers and awarding organisations from across all sectors and levels of qualification to provide unique insight, expertise and knowledge to address the current and long-term issues and ambitions of the sector.



