



# SKILLS FOR ALL

## TEN KEY INSIGHTS FROM EMPLOYERS

Polling data from  
The St Martin's Group and Ipsos

**June 2025**

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## Foreword from the Co-Chairs

The St Martin's Group (SMG) is committed to supporting the UK economy by fostering a sustainable, quality-focused, and employer-led apprenticeships and skills system: up-to-date evidence of the needs and perspectives of employers underpins this commitment. As we navigate a period of policy reform, we undertook polling - in collaboration with Ipsos - **gathering direct perspectives from over 800 employers** on England's apprenticeship and skills system.

This report, "Skills for All: Ten Key Insights from Employers" summarises the findings from polling conducted in January and February 2025. It offers timely and relevant insights for policymakers, supporting engagement efforts and serving as a springboard for deeper conversations.

**A common thread that emerges is that skills policy should address the needs of employers whatever their size, and learners whatever their age or stage.**

**Employers know the skills needed to grow their businesses and the challenges they face in recruiting and developing talent.** Understanding their experiences and expectations is crucial for building a skills system that effectively addresses skills gaps, boosts productivity and drives economic growth.

The ten key findings in this report directly reflect the views of those on the frontlines of skills development and recruitment. We believe **listening to, and meeting employer expectations will help deliver the government's mission to ensure we have the skills to drive productivity and economic growth.** By understanding employer priorities in detail, such as their preference for developing existing employees first, their difficulty in recruiting higher-level skills, and their desire for flexibility in training programmes, policymakers can develop effective and relevant interventions.

This report offers **actionable insights, grounded in the realities and expectations of businesses across England.** Our aim is to contribute to a more responsive skills policy framework that **is embraced and actively utilised by employers and contributes to driving success.** We trust that the findings and recommendations in this report will be a valuable resource for shaping a future skills system that truly meets the needs of employers, learners, and the wider UK economy.



Brenda McLeish

Co-Chair of SMG



Jane Hadfield

Co-Chair of SMG

# 10 Key Findings from Employer Surveys

## 1. **There is consensus that national skills policy needs to target all ages and all levels.**

Employers call for an inclusive approach empowering individuals at every stage of their careers, supporting lifelong learning and skills development across the entire workforce.

## 2. **When employers have a skills gap in their organisation, they will develop existing employees first.**

To achieve faster productivity gains, the most common employer practise is to upskill current employees rather than hire new ones.

## 3. **It is much harder to recruit individuals with higher level skills than to fill entry level positions.**

Employers across both surveys find it significantly more difficult to recruit for positions requiring higher-level skills, reinforcing the value of internal skills development.

## 4. **Most employers find it harder to develop young people's soft skills than technical skills.**

To improve a young person's employability and contribution to productivity, pre-employment soft skills development may reduce barriers to creating opportunities.

## 5. **Over 70% of employers believe an apprenticeship should be at least a year long.**

Employers value the existing apprenticeship structure with strong intention to hire apprentices in the future. Shorter durations are welcome but clear distinction between the two is required.

## 6. **Less than 10% of employers believe creating more university places will support their organisation's growth.**

There is significant sentiment among employers to prioritise vocational and work-based learning routes such as apprenticeships and short-term training courses.

## 7. **Employers want flexibility over the content and structure of skills programmes.**

Employers favour skills programmes that enable them to customise part of the training to align with their specific business needs and culture.

## 8. **Over 65% of employers believe a new Growth and Skills Levy should be used to fund other professional qualifications and training.**

Most employers would like vocational and higher technical qualifications, management qualifications, and soft skills training included in a new Growth and Skills Levy.

## 9. **There are marked differences in key areas between large and small employers in relation to skills needs and attitudes.**

There are notable differences between large and small employers regarding their engagement with government and intentions to use new apprenticeship products.

## 10. **Over 60% of employers believe skills policy should be coordinated at both a local and national level.**

Employers desire a balanced approach that combines a national framework with local flexibility to meet diverse regional and sectoral needs.



# Policy Recommendations

Advice to policymakers for developing skills policies, based on insights and data from Ipsos and The St Martin's Group employer surveys.

## 1) Supporting young People into sustainable careers

Supporting young people into employment and developing their skills and careers is integral for a productive and sustainable economy. Insights from Ipsos and The St Martin's Group (SMG) survey, along with previous SMG research, provide clear signposts and conclusions on how to effectively support young people.

### Findings

Employers face challenges in recruiting externally and tend to prioritise development of their existing workforce when faced with a skills gap. They often find young people lacking essential soft skills needed to thrive in the workplace, with soft skills being harder to develop than technical skills. Apprenticeships are highly valued by employers, who appreciate the in-depth learning these programmes offer over at least a year. Employers believe that increasing university places will not necessarily support their growth, but they do see significant value in vocational, work-based routes including shorter, flexible training programmes.

### Conclusions and recommendations

Listening to employers is vital. They want short, flexible programmes to help train and develop young people, but they also highly value apprenticeship and technical programmes for employees of all ages. Recruiting young people with no experience is seen as difficult and risky. Therefore, upstream changes to the educational curriculum and access-to-work programmes are essential in preparing young people for the workforce. Employers need pre-employment initiatives focused on cultivating soft skills that improve a young person's employability and their immediate contribution to workplace productivity. This enhances their career development, serving as a stepping stone towards apprenticeships once they are more established within an organisation. The government should recognise the broader societal factors that impact the recruitment of young people, such as challenges relating to mental health, poor school attendance, and geographic disparities.

The government should be intentional in supporting employers who hire young people, especially those facing barriers to employment (e.g., lower educational attainment), through targeted tax breaks, incentives, and flexible training interventions. While apprenticeships are popular with employers, they may not always be the best starting point for young people entering sustainable careers.

## 2) A system that works for SMEs and larger employers

A training system that benefits the UK economy must cater to both smaller and larger businesses. The surveys show marked differences between the needs and attitudes of employers of differing sizes to recruiting, training and upskilling employees.

### Findings

There are notable differences between the needs of small and large employers. Small employers feel that their skills needs are better understood by the government compared to large employers. There are also divergent views on the appeal of new shorter apprenticeships and foundation apprenticeships. SMG, based on extensive stakeholder engagement, notes a risk of confusion regarding the distinctions between Foundation Apprenticeships, Short Apprenticeships, Apprenticeships, and short Levy-funded courses. Over half of employers believe that both national and local policies play a role in designing and implementing skills policy.

## Conclusions and recommendations

Whilst recognising that navigating the skills system requires simplification, it is clear that a one-size-fits-all strategy will not meet employers' needs and will hamper take up. Large employers find it more challenging to develop soft skills compared to technical skills, while small employers find it easier to cultivate these soft skills. The new Foundation Apprenticeships appear to have more appeal for smaller employers. More research is needed, but it is plausible that the size and structure of an organisation influences the challenges associated with developing workplace skills. For instance, a young person in a smaller organisation may receive a more personalised learning experience than in a larger organisation. A skills system that recognises and responds to the differing challenges will be crucial for the successful implementation and take up of initiatives by businesses of all sizes.

### 3) An all age all level skills system

Economic growth requires the whole workforce to be productive. An employee's career is shaped by their entire training journey, not just at the start, middle, or end.

#### Findings

A majority of employers believe that skills policy should target all ages and all levels. Approximately 30% think it should focus on specific areas of skills shortages. Across respondents from SMG and Ipsos surveys, only about 13% believe that skills policy should exclusively focus on young people. Employers value flexibility and choice in the content of skills programmes, in their training partners and in their ability to use funds under a new Growth and Skills Levy for a wider range of qualifications and training.

#### Conclusions and recommendations

The government should recognise that the skills system, like the workforce, is interwoven and interconnected. Skills policy must cater to all levels and abilities. Different employers, like different employees, have varying needs and requirements. This is why the voice of employers is vital in deciding how the new Growth and Skills Levy is allocated. Focusing solely on one group of employees, while seemingly attractive, is likely to be counterproductive. For employers, there is an expectation of lifelong learning in a national skills policy that enables progress for everyone. It also acknowledges the economic need for re-skilling, the ageing workforce, and the fact that new opportunities depend on employers' increasing productivity.



# Methodology and Report Structure

This report examines the views of employers on the apprenticeships and skills system, as well as proposed reforms. It presents 10 key findings aimed at supporting policy development.

The report is informed by **two surveys**. One undertaken by **Ipsos**, a leading market and public opinion research firm, the other undertaken by **The St Martin's Group (SMG)**. SMG is a membership organisation that supports the UK economy bringing together leading employers, training providers, and awarding organisations to foster a sustainable, quality-focused and employer-led apprenticeships and skills system.

Conducted from January to February 2025, the surveys capture the views of **over 800 employers** on England's apprenticeship and skills system, as well as proposed reforms, with the aim of informing future policy development.

The Ipsos survey research was carried out by Ipsos on behalf of SMG. Using an online survey approach, Ipsos interviewed a sample of **505 respondents**, two-thirds of which were from small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) and a third from large enterprises, who are responsible or have a significant input into recruitment and training in England. For the purposes of this report, SMEs have been defined as organisations with fewer than 250 employees.

To supplement the Ipsos survey and using the same questions, SMG collected data from **320 respondents** from its wider network which were predominately from larger organisations who had more than 250 employees. A plurality of the respondents had more than 1,000 employees.

Both surveys collated views from employers located across the various regions of England, and key industries identified as growth drivers for the government's Industrial Strategy. These include industries such as **manufacturing, energy, and construction, healthcare, education, technology, media and communications, and financial and professional services**. Both surveys targeted those responsible for, or who have significant input into training and recruitment within their organisations. Variations in the differing sample compositions and their impact on the findings have been addressed throughout the report.

Ipsos was responsible for the data collection element of the study and SMG responsible for the question design, reporting and interpretation of results. Technical data is provided in the appendix.

The core of this report is structured around **ten key employer findings** derived directly from the analysis of these surveys. The findings highlight important aspects of how employers experience the current skills landscape, their priorities when addressing skills gaps, and their perspectives on potential policy changes. By directly examining employer responses, this report seeks to provide policymakers with insights based on the realities and expectations of those who ultimately drive skills demand and workforce development.



# 10 Key Employer Findings

## 1) There is a consensus that a national skills policy needs to target all ages and all levels

**A cohesive national skills policy is vital to stimulating growth and productivity across the UK. There is broad consensus amongst employers surveyed that a national skills policy should target people of all ages and skill levels. Employers would like to see a comprehensive approach that views learning and skills development as a lifelong endeavour for all segments of the workforce.**

The Ipsos survey found that 47% of employers surveyed think that a national skills policy that trains all ages and all skill levels would most benefit their organisation (see table 1 in the appendix), with 59% of respondents saying this in the SMG survey.

This may indicate a preference for **an inclusive skills policy, which underscores a critical point: skills development should not be age-restricted or limited to certain sectors of the workforce.** Rather, employers would prefer an inclusive approach, empowering individuals at every stage of their careers, from entry-level workers to experienced professionals, and from young people entering the job market to older workers looking to reskill or upskill.

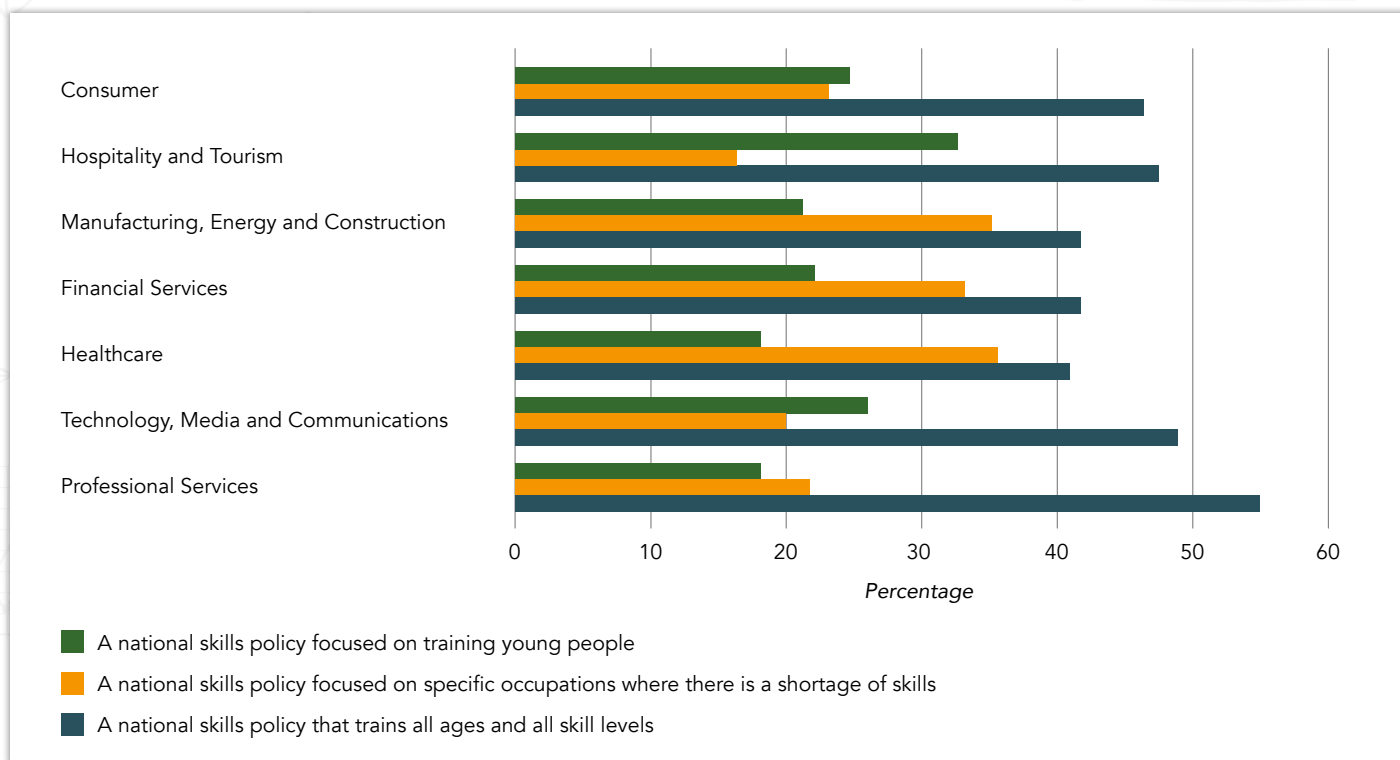
The need for such a broad-based approach is further highlighted by the stark contrast in employer attitudes towards a policy focused primarily on training young people. 22% of the employers surveyed by Ipsos and 5% of those surveyed by SMG think that a national skills policy focused on training young people would benefit their organisation. While this is important, it is clear that supporting young people should form a part of a broader skills landscape that addresses the needs of the entire workforce.

Support for a national skills policy that trains all ages, and all skill levels is high across regions surveyed in England. The East Midlands is particularly high, with 61% of those surveyed indicating that they preferred this option. Yorkshire and the Humber (54%), East of England (52%) and West Midlands (51%) also demonstrated a high level of support for this approach to national skills policy. In the SMG survey, 63% of the employers from the West Midlands and 54% from Yorkshire and The Humber also indicated that policy focused on occupation where there are skills shortages would be most beneficial. Among those surveyed by Ipsos, 40% of the employers surveyed from the North West indicated that they thought a national skills policy focused on specific occupations where there were skills shortages was most beneficial to their organisations, which was higher than any other region (see figure 11 in the appendix).

There is also a strong consensus among respondents from different industries for this type of approach to skills policy, particularly professional services (55%).

**Among those surveyed, 59% (SMG) and 47% (Ipsos) of employers think that a national skills policy that trains all ages and all skill levels would benefit their organisation.**

**Figure 1:** A breakdown by industry of those who prefer a national skills policy that trains all ages and all skill levels; specific occupations where there is a shortage of skills; training young people (Ipsos)<sup>1</sup>



SMG believes that this perspective echoes employer sentiments in the next key finding: emphasising the need for government-funded training options to be accessible to employees throughout their careers. It reflects a belief that lifelong learning and development are crucial for sustained economic growth.

<sup>1</sup> Q12 *Thinking about national skills policy, which one, if any, of the following would most benefit your organisation?* (Ipsos): n=505 Employers responsible or have a significant input into recruitment and training in SME's & Large Enterprises in England. Technology, Media & Communications n=61\*, Financial Services n=46\*, Hospitality & Tourism n=36\*, Professional Services n=51\*. Healthcare n=33\*, Consumer n=65\*, Manufacturing, Energy & Construction n=120

## 2) When employers have a skills gap in their organisation, they will develop existing employees first

**When an employer identifies a lack of necessary skills within their workforce, their initial response is more likely to involve training and upskilling their current staff rather than immediately recruiting new employees.**

This tendency is supported by survey data from both Ipsos and SMG (see table 2 in the appendix). In the Ipsos survey, **52% said that they would typically look to develop existing employees first** if they identified a lack of skills within their organisation, while 54% of those surveyed by SMG echoed this approach. Employers were less inclined to recruit new employees with the required experience or hire less experienced workers (who would then receive training). Among the employers surveyed by SMG, only 7% said they took a different approach, combining the recruitment of new hires and the development of existing employees when addressing skills gaps.

The preference for developing existing employees was a consistent trend across most employers. Among those surveyed from key industries, those in the consumer industry were the most likely to say they would develop existing employees first (63%). Most employers that were surveyed in the healthcare industry (55%), the manufacturing, energy and construction industry (51%), and the technology, media and communications industry (51%) also supported upskilling existing employees when attempting to close skills gaps within their organisations.



*52% of employers from the Ipsos survey said they would look to develop existing employees first if they identified a lack of skills within their organisation.*

### Impact on productivity

The surveys highlight a key reason why employers may focus on upskilling their existing employees. Among those surveyed, 43% (Ipsos) and 39% (SMG) of respondents agreed that skills and training investments in young people (see table 3 in the appendix), specifically those who come straight from school, college or university, would have an impact on the business' productivity in the medium-term (between 1 – 3 years). While employers may be aware of the government's focus on younger learners to improve long-term economic prospects, they have a greater appetite to invest in upskilling their current workforce to see quicker returns on productivity.

The data also indicates that **employers are less likely to immediately hire new staff to resolve skills gaps**. These findings suggest employers may value skills policies equipping young learners with abilities that can rapidly contribute to productivity, alongside a greater focus on upskilling the existing workforce. Focusing solely on foundational skills for new, young entrants does not address the realities of how employers recruit and improve their workforce and is not the primary solution employers pursue when facing skills shortages.

This preference for developing existing employees indicates skills policy interventions should provide solutions accessible to employees at all stages of their careers.

**43% of respondents from the Ipsos survey agree that skills and training investment in young people would have an impact on business productivity in the medium term (1-3 years).**



### 3) It is much harder to recruit individuals with higher level skills than to fill entry level positions

#### Acquiring experienced and qualified staff from the external labour market is a challenge for employers.

According to the surveys, **33% (Ipsos) and 30% (SMG) of respondents find it 'fairly difficult' to recruit for positions requiring higher-level skills**, which are defined as including specific qualifications and extensive work experience<sup>2</sup>. This is in contrast to the 13% (Ipsos) and 2% (SMG) who find it 'very easy' to recruit individuals with higher level skills (see table 4 in the appendix).

**Employers of all sizes noted the difficulty in recruiting for higher-level skills.** Among the employers surveyed by SMG, 71% of businesses with 50-249 employees found it either 'fairly difficult' or 'very difficult' to recruit for positions requiring higher-level skills (see figure 12 in the appendix). Likewise, a significant proportion (60%) of businesses with 1,000-4,900 employees said it was 'fairly difficult' or 'very difficult' to recruit for these roles. This indicates that both SMEs and large employers view the external recruitment of highly qualified staff as a challenge.

**55% of SMG and 49% of Ipsos respondents report finding it fairly difficult or very difficult to recruit for higher-level skills.**

**This difficulty in recruiting for higher level skills is also evident across various industries.** Employers surveyed by Ipsos from the manufacturing, energy and construction industry (55%), consumer industry (55%), the healthcare industry (52%), and the professional services industry (49%), were also more likely to report finding it either 'fairly difficult' or 'very difficult' to recruit people with higher level skills<sup>3</sup>.

Conversely, most respondents find it easier to hire for positions requiring lower-level skills, defined as including entry level roles and no previous experience. **Nearly three-quarters (Ipsos) and two-thirds (SMG) of respondents believed it was 'very easy' or 'fairly easy' to hire at this level.** Despite this ease, the data from the second finding shows that employers will prioritise developing their current workforce over addressing skills gaps by hiring entry-level workers. This preference may be linked to their perception of long-term productivity returns.



**74% of Ipsos and 64% of SMG respondents report finding it fairly easy or very easy to recruit for lower-level skills.**

SMG believes these findings underscore the **limitations of relying on external recruitment** to acquire necessary expertise. They reflect employers' inclination to focus on developing their existing workforce and reinforce the need for enhanced skills development pathways throughout careers, as emphasised in the first two findings.

<sup>2</sup> Q2 To what extent does your organisation find it easy or difficult to recruit for positions requiring ...

Base (Ipsos): n=505 Employers responsible or have a significant input into recruitment and training in SME's & Large Enterprises in England (see appendix – table 4)

<sup>3</sup> Q2 To what extent does your organisation find it easy or difficult to recruit for positions requiring ...

Higher level skills (e.g., specific qualifications, managerial levels, extensive experience, etc.) Base (Ipsos): Employers responsible or have a significant input into recruitment and training in SME's & Large Enterprises in England: Technology, Media & Communications n=61, Financial Services n=46, Hospitality & Tourism n=36, Professional Services n=51. Healthcare n=33, Consumer n=65, Manufacturing, Energy & Construction n=120 (see appendix – figure 13)

#### 4) It is harder to develop young people's soft skills than technical skills

**Findings from the survey indicate a key area hindering the integration of young people into the workforce: employers find it hard to develop their soft skills.**

59% (Ipsos) and 58% (SMG) of respondents find it either **'fairly' or 'very easy'** to develop a young person's technical skills

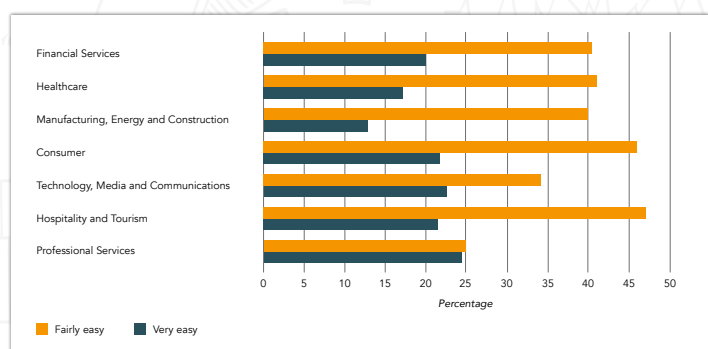
to do the job, suggesting that there is broad confidence in their own capacity to train new, less experienced hires in specific job-related tasks (see table 5 in the appendix). When the same employers were asked about developing soft skills (e.g. communication skills, team working, etc) 57% of Ipsos respondents found it either 'fairly' or 'very easy' to develop

a young person's soft skills, but this figure drops to only 33% in the SMG survey. This discrepancy suggests that, particularly for the larger employers surveyed by SMG, soft skills development in younger recruits is a hurdle.

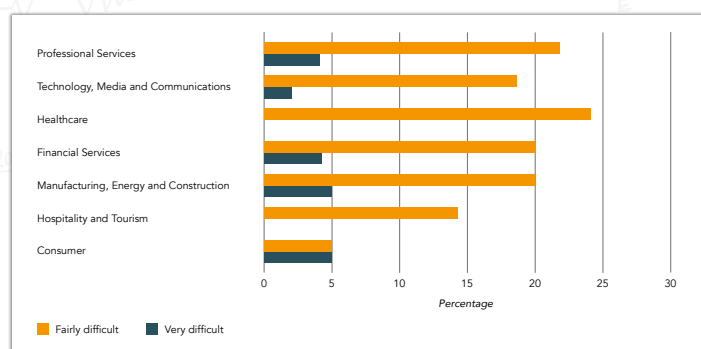
Employers perceptions on the ease or difficulty of developing a young person's soft skills varied across different industries in the Ipsos survey.

**Just one-third of SMG respondents (33%) find it easy to develop a young person's soft skills.**

**Figure 2:** Views on whether developing a young person's soft skills is 'fairly' or 'very easy', based on industry (Ipsos)<sup>4</sup>



**Figure 3:** Views on whether developing a young person's soft skills is 'fairly' or 'very difficult', based on industry (Ipsos)<sup>5</sup>



Addressing a young person's lack of soft skills can result in **additional costs for employers**, given that other colleagues will need to set time aside to provide informal training or pastoral care. Instead, there is demand for young recruits to possess adequate soft skills by the time they enter the job market. Given the cost of employing young workers without the requisite soft skills, **employers are more likely to continue to favour the upskilling of existing employees rather than hiring new ones**. To create more opportunities for young people, skills policy should seek to address this specific development need to improve their employability and contribution to productivity.

<sup>4</sup> Q3 On balance, to what extent do you find each of the following areas of development easy or difficult?

Developing the young person's soft skills (e.g., communication skills, team working, etc.). Base (Ipsos): Employers responsible or have a significant input into recruitment and training in SME's & Large Enterprises in England: Technology, Media & Communications n=61\*, Financial Services n=46\*, Hospitality & Tourism n=36\*, Professional Services n=51\*. Healthcare n=33\*, Consumer n=65\*, Manufacturing, Energy & Construction n=120

<sup>5</sup> Q3 On balance, to what extent do you find each of the following areas of development easy or difficult?

Developing the young person's soft skills (e.g., communication skills, team working, etc.). Base (Ipsos): Employers responsible or have a significant input into recruitment and training in SME's & Large Enterprises in England: Technology, Media & Communications n=61\*, Financial Services n=46\*, Hospitality & Tourism n=36\*, Professional Services n=51\*. Healthcare n=33\*, Consumer n=65\*, Manufacturing, Energy & Construction n=120

This could be achieved with increased emphasis and investment in **pre-employability programmes**. SMG believes employers want better employability skills for those entering employment. This means individuals have the necessary skills to join the workforce, whether that is due to widening participation efforts or programmes undertaken during education. To deliver this, **the connectivity between access to work programmes and education needs to be improved**. An example of best practice currently in action is Sector Work Based Academies, which promote industry-relevant skills, strong employer connections and improved job readiness. In parallel, support and incentivisation for employers, such as tax breaks to help meet the costs of hiring and managing young people, should be considered.





## 5) Over 70% of employers believe an apprenticeship should be at least a year long

**The surveys found that over 70% of employers (SMG, 71%; Ipsos, 73%) believe an apprenticeship should be at least 12 months.**

This suggests a widespread belief that a more substantial time commitment is necessary to embed the knowledge, skills and behaviours required for full competency. This consensus spans different employer sizes, as 67% of smaller employers, 70% for medium-sized employers and 79% for larger employers in the Ipsos survey said it was appropriate for an apprenticeship to last at least 12 months<sup>6</sup>.

This trend was also evident among those surveyed by SMG. Organisations with 50-249 employees were overwhelmingly in favour (94%) of a training period of at least 12 months. Similarly, 76% of organisations with 250-999 employees, 71% of organisations with 1,000-4,999, and 57% of organisations with over 5,000 employees said they thought a period of at least 12 months was most appropriate for an apprenticeship (see figure 15 in the appendix).

Equally, however, the government's commitment to allow non-apprenticeship, shorter training as part of the new Growth and Skills offer is a welcome step forward. There is a distinct role for both types of training. To date, foundation and shorter-duration apprenticeships have been confirmed. Regardless of the flexibilities this affords employers, these solutions must be simple and coherent to avoid disengagement. It is worth considering whether these varied approaches to shortened learning may even need to be called 'apprenticeships', as a clear distinction between apprenticeships and shorter courses might improve uptake of both.

### Future Apprentice Uptake

Both surveys show a **strong current uptake of apprenticeships by employers and that most are either certain or very likely to hire apprentices in the future.**

Over 83% of employers surveyed by SMG and 58% by Ipsos have apprentices on programmes currently<sup>7</sup>. 80% (SMG) and 79% (Ipsos) reported they were either certain, very likely or likely to hire apprentices in the future<sup>8</sup>. This suggests there is appetite to hire apprentices under the existing apprenticeship duration of 12 months. The strong uptake and future desire for apprenticeships across several regions and industries suggests that employers generally value apprenticeships as a route to skilled labour, provided the minimum length of time of these programmes is sufficient to be effective.



*80% (SMG) and 79% (Ipsos) of employers surveyed said that they are either certain, very likely or likely to hire apprentices in the future.*

<sup>6</sup> Q10 *Thinking about the minimum duration of an apprenticeship programme, which one of the following do you think is most appropriate?*

Base (Ipsos): Employers responsible or have a significant input into recruitment and training in SME's & Large Enterprises in England who are likely to hire apprentices in their organisation in the future: Small n=109, Medium n=141, Large n=147 (see appendix – figure 14)

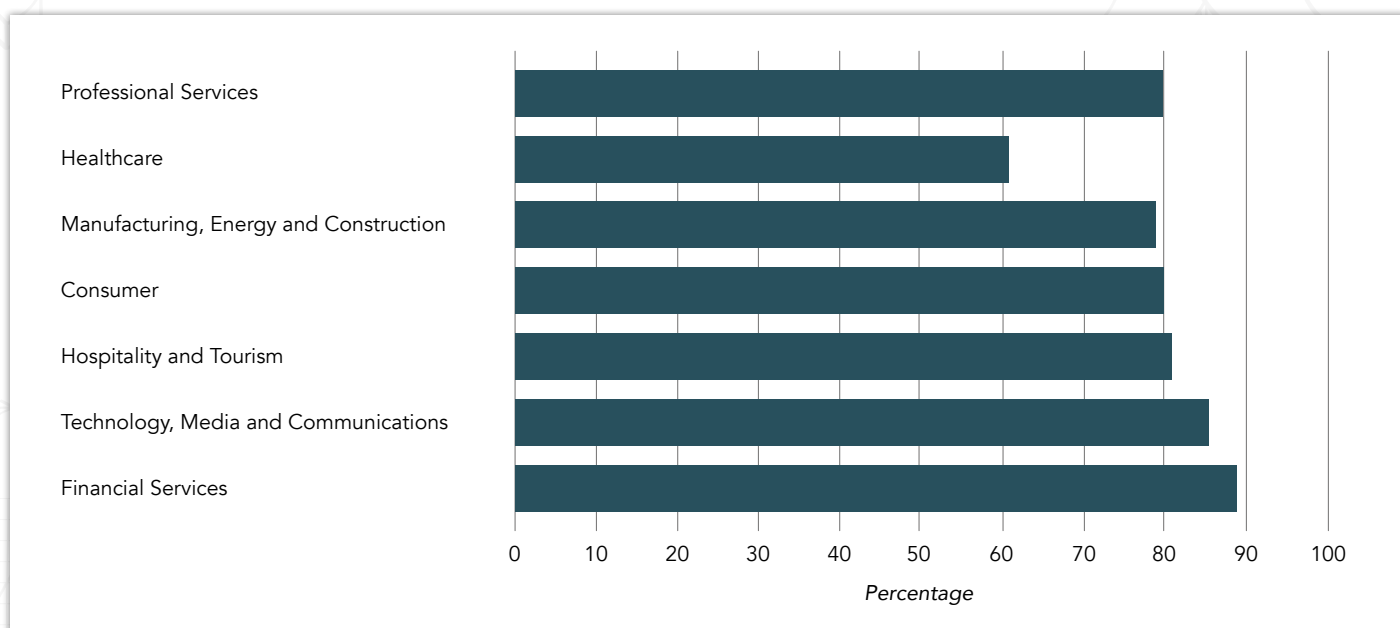
<sup>7</sup> Q6 *Do you currently have apprentices on programmes within your organisation, or not?*

Base (Ipsos): n=505 Employers responsible or have a significant input into recruitment and training in SME's & Large Enterprises in England

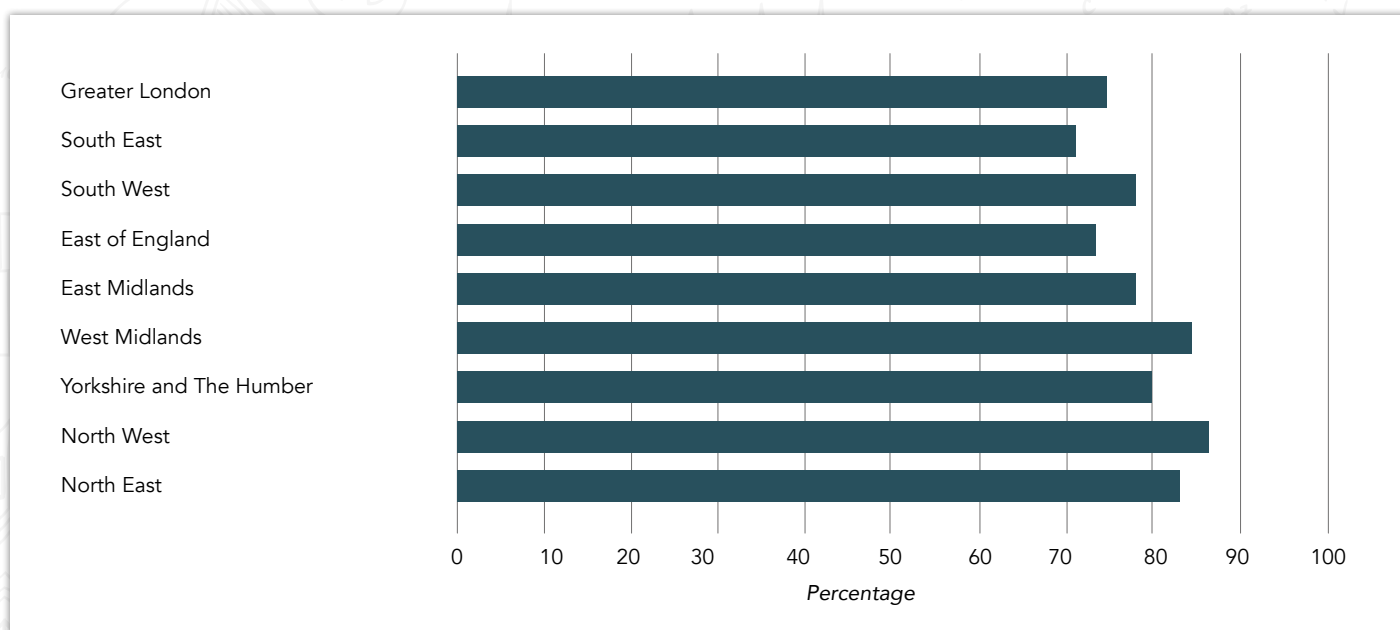
<sup>8</sup> Q7 *How likely, or unlikely, is your organisation to hire apprentices in the future?*

Base (Ipsos): n=505 Employers responsible or have a significant input into recruitment and training in SME's & Large Enterprises in England

**Figure 4:** Organisations that are certain or likely to hire apprentices in the future by industry (Ipsos)<sup>9</sup>



**Figure 5:** Organisations that are certain or likely to hire apprentices in the future by region (Ipsos)<sup>10</sup>



SMG believes this finding suggests apprenticeships are already valued by employers as high-quality, occupational competency pathways. **While increasing employer engagement and apprenticeship availability will need to remain a priority, policy developments might now be more effectively directed towards delivering non-apprenticeship training pathways.**

<sup>9</sup> Q7 *How likely, or unlikely, is your organisation to hire apprentices in the future?*

Base (Ipsos): Employers responsible or have a significant input into recruitment and training in SME's & Large Enterprises in England: Technology, Media & Communications n=61, Financial Services n=46, Hospitality & Tourism n=36, Professional Services n=51. Healthcare n=33, Consumer n=65, Manufacturing, Energy & Construction n=120

<sup>10</sup> Q7 *How likely, or unlikely, is your organisation to hire apprentices in the future?*

Employers responsible or have a significant input into recruitment and training in SME's & Large Enterprises in England: North East n=36, North West n=86, Yorkshire and The Humber n=41, West Midlands n=45, East Midlands n=33, East of England n=54, South West n=33, South East n=55, Greater London n=122

## 6) Less than 10% of employers believe creating more university places will support their organisation's growth

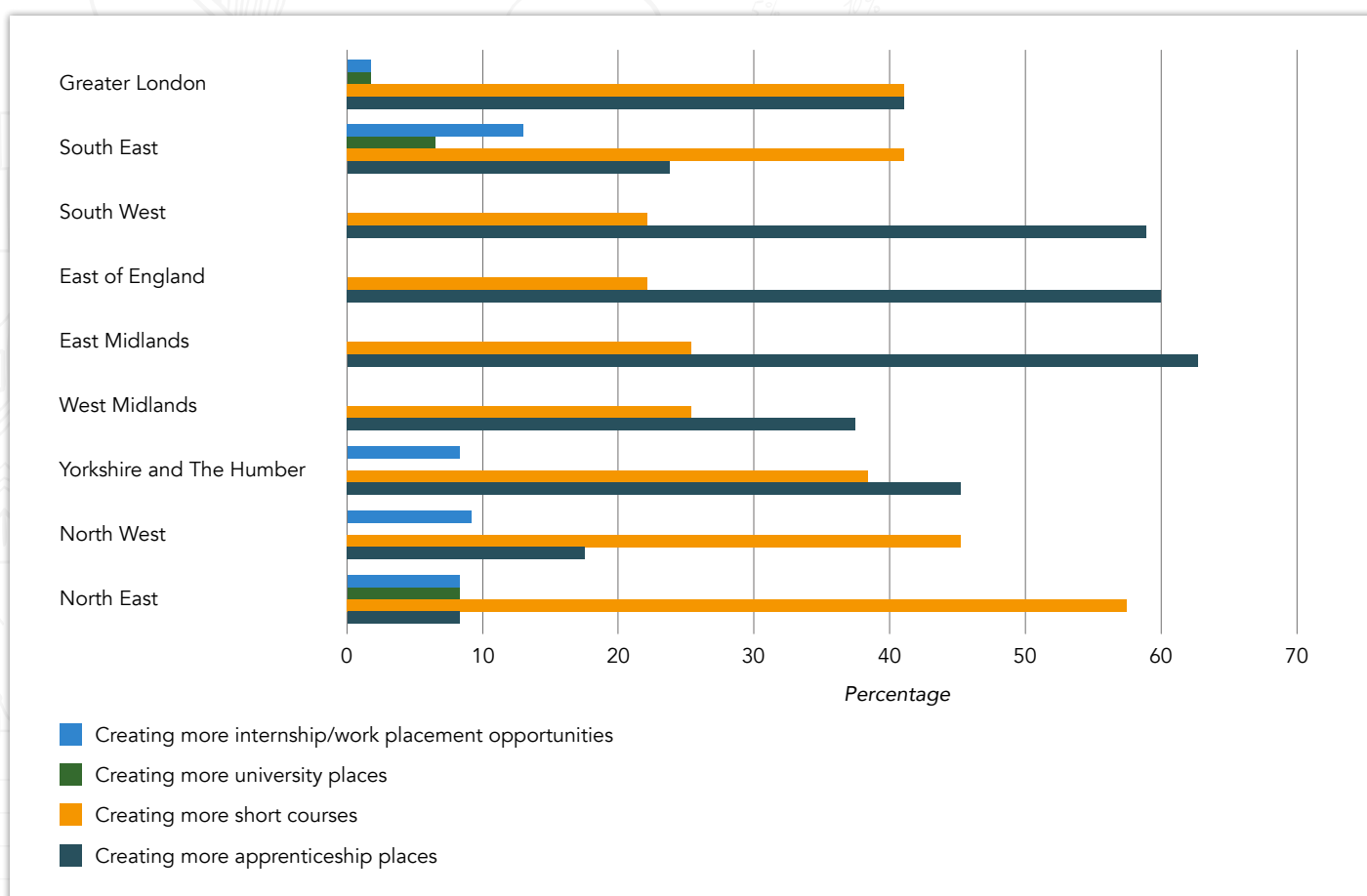
**Employers surveyed believe that increasing routes to employment for learners, beyond the traditional three-year university degree, will benefit their organisation. Apprenticeships and other vocational work-based learning should be prioritised.**

Among those surveyed, 9% (Ipsos) and 2% (SMG) of respondents think that the government should prioritise creating more university places to support with organisations like theirs, compared to 31% (Ipsos) and 40% (SMG) who think they should prioritise creating more apprenticeship places (see table 7 in the appendix). In addition, 24% (Ipsos) and 37% (SMG) said the government should prioritise creating more short-term training courses to help support organisations like theirs. This highlights a **significant sentiment among employers who prioritise vocational and work-based learning routes** over traditional graduate hiring for meeting their workforce needs.

The increasing number of apprenticeship starts supports this. In 2023-24, nearly 400,000 apprenticeship starts were recorded, a slight increase from 2022-23, when there were 337,000 starts<sup>11</sup>.

*31% (Ipsos) and 40% (SMG) of employers surveyed favour the creation of more apprenticeship places to meet their workforce needs.*

**Figure 6:** Views on prioritising the creation of more internship and work placement opportunities, university places, apprenticeship places and short courses by region (SMG)<sup>12</sup>



<sup>11</sup> House of Commons Library, [Apprenticeship statistics](#), 29.1.25

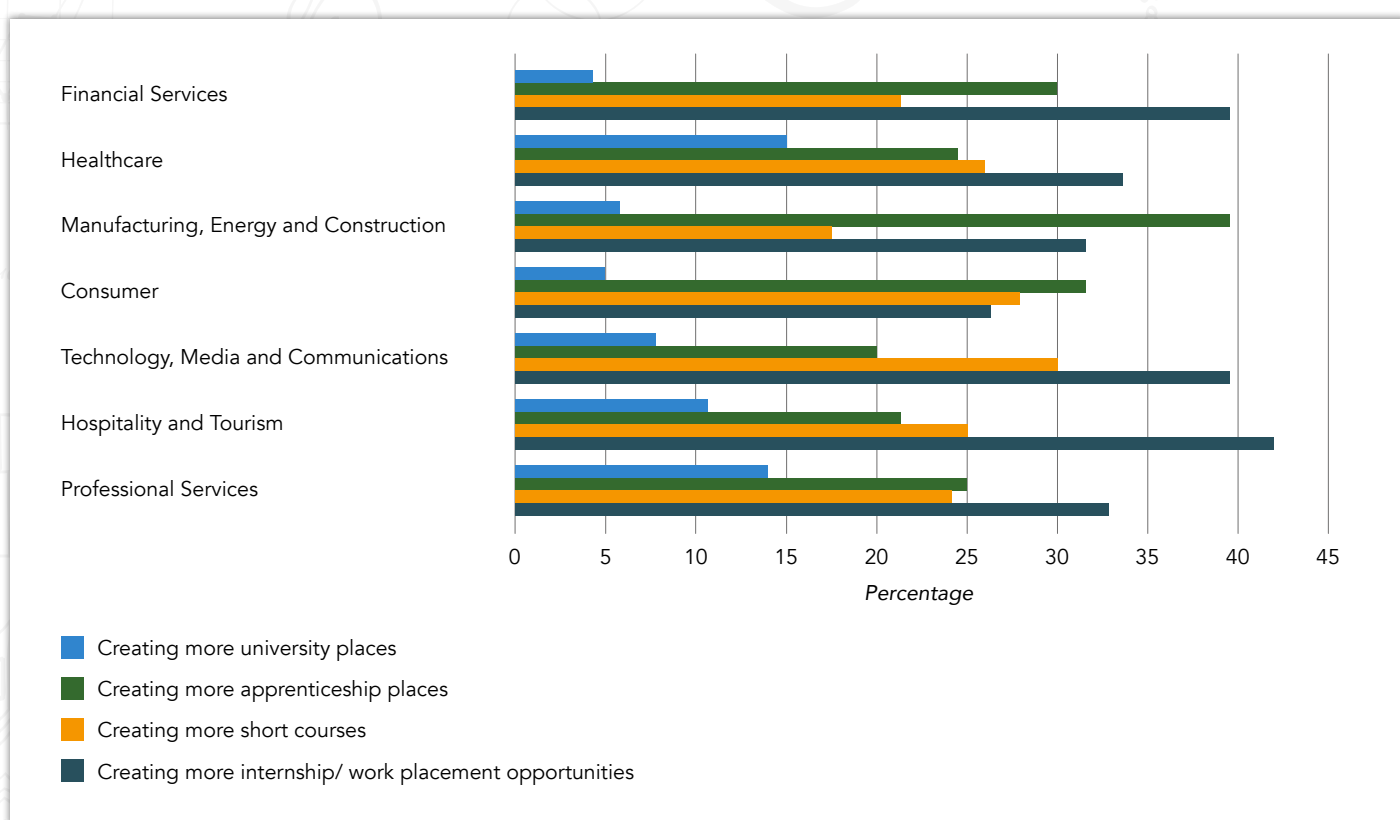
<sup>12</sup> Responses to this question came from a base of 145 respondents (SMG)



Among those surveyed by SMG, employers in the East Midlands (63%), East of England (60%), the South West (59%), and Yorkshire (46%) said that the **government should prioritise the creation of more apprenticeship places**, compared to only 8% of employers in the North East and 18% in the North West. Employers that said they favoured the creation of more short courses included the North East (58%), the North West (45%), and the South East (41%). Similarly, among those surveyed by Ipsos, 17% (North East), 23% (North West) and 29% (South East) of employers were in favour of creating more short courses.

**The surveys also found that 32% (Ipsos) and 4% (SMG) think that the government should prioritise creating more internships and work placement opportunities to help support organisations.** The data suggests that smaller organisations show more appetite for this perhaps given the durations of internships and work placement programmes tend to be shorter, and so less of a commitment. Aligned with the government's mission to 'break down the barriers to opportunity', future policy could capitalise on this, developing more of these opportunities to stimulate regional demand and provide local routes for young people.

**Figure 7: Views on prioritising the creation of more internship and work placement opportunities, university places, apprenticeship places and short courses by industry (Ipsos)<sup>13</sup>**



The Ipsos survey found that employers surveyed in the technology, media and communications (39%), healthcare (33%) and the hospitality and tourism (42%) industries think that the UK Government should prioritise creating more internship and work placement opportunities to help support organisations. Conversely, the survey also highlights that respondents in the financial services (30%), the consumer industry (32%), and the manufacturing, energy and construction (39%) industries think that the government should prioritise creating more apprenticeship places.

These findings underscore the importance of focusing skills policy on diverse routes to employment that are more directly aligned with employer needs and can provide quicker pathways to a skilled workforce.

<sup>13</sup> Q14 In your opinion, which one, if any, of the following initiatives, should the UK government prioritise to help support organisations like yours? Base (Ipsos): Employers responsible or have a significant input into recruitment and training in SME's & Large Enterprises in England: Technology, Media & Communications n=61, Financial Services n=46, Hospitality & Tourism n=36, Professional Services n=51. Healthcare n=33, Consumer n=65, Manufacturing, Energy & Construction n=120

## 7) Employers want flexibility over the content and structure of skills programmes

**Current and future policy should ensure that employers have flexibility over the content and structure of skills programmes. Employers surveyed say they are more likely to prefer a partially prescribed training programme, where they have some flexibility over content, over a fully prescribed one.**

70% of employers surveyed by SMG think that organisations like theirs **should follow a partially prescribed apprenticeship programme** (see table 8 in the appendix). Customisation of skills programmes could allow an employer to shape specific parts of programmes to better fit their work culture, core values, and business model to ensure that learners are work competent once their programme is complete. This could maximise buy-in from employers as programmes will be more relevant and could increase investment in training. Previous research conducted by SMG highlighted employers' support for an 80/20 model (where 80% of an apprentices' learning is set by the apprenticeship standard and 20% is set at the discretion of the employer), to ensure that employers have sufficient ability to shape the training undertaken by the learner.

Among employers surveyed by SMG, the preference for partially prescribed apprenticeship programmes was clear across all size categories. Larger organisations with 1,000-4,999 employees were the most likely (82%) to say that employers should be able to shape programmes (see figure 18 in the appendix). Notably, smaller organisations with 50-249 employees supported the customisation of programmes to a similar degree (79%).

In the Ipsos survey, employers surveyed from the manufacturing, energy and construction industry (57%) were most likely to select a partly prescribed programme (see figure 19 in the appendix). This was followed by the financial services industry (54%), the consumer industry (50%) and the technology, media and communications industry (50%)<sup>14</sup>.

### Employer choice extends to sourcing providers

With regards to choice and flexibility, employers were asked how they prefer to source a training provider.

There was no clear consensus in either survey regarding the choice of training providers (see table 9 in the appendix). Employers were split between independently choosing providers and selecting from a pre-approved list of suppliers. This division in opinion suggests that employers prefer a flexible approach to selecting providers rather than a prescribed one. The data clearly indicates that the least preferred option for employers is being instructed on which training provider to use. Therefore, the system should continue to allow employers to choose their training providers.



*70% of employers surveyed by SMG said that they would prefer an apprenticeship programme which is partially prescribed rather than fully prescribed.*

<sup>14</sup> Q8 Do you think organisations like yours should follow an apprenticeship programme that is fully prescribed (i.e., you must fully follow mandatory content), or one that is partly prescribed (i.e., you have some flexibility over content)?

Base (Ipsos) Employers responsible or have a significant input into recruitment and training in SME's & Large Enterprises in England: Technology, Media & Communications n=26, Financial Services n=22, Hospitality & Tourism n=12, Professional Services n=19. Healthcare n=12, Consumer n=26, Manufacturing, Energy & Construction n=54

## 8) Over 65% of employers surveyed believe the new Growth and Skills Levy should be used to fund other professional qualifications and training

**The majority of employers surveyed welcome the commitment to broaden the scope of the current apprenticeship levy to address a wider range of skills within their organisation.**

Both surveys found that there is positivity towards a **new Growth and Skills Levy** which would fund training and other professional qualifications outside of an apprenticeship, with 25% (Ipsos) and 30% (SMG) of respondents agreeing that they are 'strongly in favour' of the Levy and an additional 44% (Ipsos) and 35% (SMG) stating they were 'somewhat in favour'. This level of support contrasts with the small percentage of respondents who had no views either way (Ipsos 23%, SMG 14%), or who were strongly or somewhat opposed (Ipsos 6%, SMG 19%) (see table 10 in the appendix).

***There is strong support from employers surveyed to broaden the current apprenticeship levy to include other vocational technical qualifications.***

Key industries identified in the government's Industrial Strategy also **support the proposed reforms to use Levy funds for non-apprenticeship programmes** (see figure 20 in the appendix), given these industries will benefit from additional flexibility in funded training options for workers under the new system.

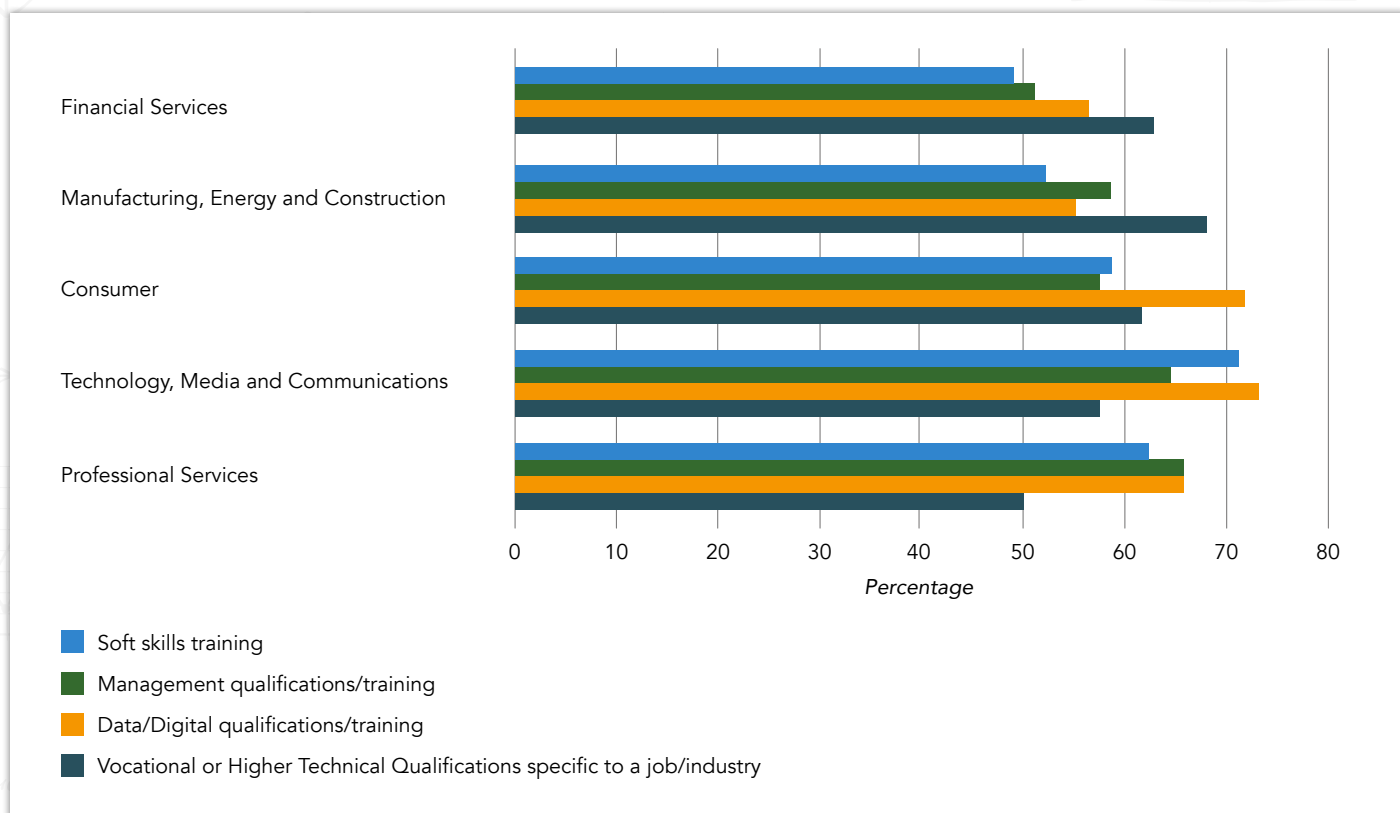
Broadening the scope of the Growth and Skills Levy should allow employers the opportunity to make **more use of government funding for non-apprenticeship programmes**, which they may deem a better fit for their specific skills needs. While acknowledging the strong support for apprenticeships, employers recognise that they may not be the most suitable solution for every skills need. In such cases, other training could play a more appropriate role, and the survey results indicate employer interest in using this option for particular qualifications and training.

Both surveys revealed that when those in favour of a new Growth and Skills Levy were asked about the types of training and other qualifications they would like to see included in the new Levy (see table 11 in the appendix), 62% (Ipsos) and 70% (SMG) said they would like to see more vocational technical qualifications or higher technical qualifications (HTQs) specific to a job or industry and more management qualifications (58% Ipsos) and 74% (SMG)<sup>15</sup>. Additionally, a large proportion of respondents also called for more soft skills training (58% Ipsos, 71% SMG) and data/digital qualifications and training (60% Ipsos, 68% SMG).

<sup>15</sup> Respondents were not limited to one choice of qualification for this question (SMG)



**Figure 8: Employer views on the types of training they would like to see included in the Growth and Skills Levy by industry (Ipsos)<sup>16 17</sup>**



Given vocational and HTQs already exist, SMG believes that bringing such qualifications into the scope of the Levy would be a quick win for the government, given the strong employer support for these. This would be particularly beneficial for priority sectors like manufacturing, energy and construction, technology, financial and professional services and health and social care, aligning with the government's growth ambitions.

However, **employers seek further clarity from the government on the non-apprenticeship programmes that will be covered**, how these will be funded and the implementation timeline, so they can effectively plan their future training investments. Additionally, there is a need for clear guidance on how apprenticeship funding will be protected, especially for smaller businesses, when flexibilities are introduced under a new Growth and Skills offer.

<sup>16</sup> Q15 To what extent are you in favour of or opposed to a new Growth and Skills Levy, which would fund training and other professional qualifications outside of an apprenticeship, or do you have no views either way?

Base (Ipsos): Employers responsible or have a significant input into recruitment and training in SME's & Large Enterprises in England: Technology, Media & Communications n=61, Financial Services n=46, Hospitality & Tourism n=36, Professional Services n=51. Healthcare n=33, Consumer n=65, Manufacturing, Energy & Construction n=120. Base (Ipsos): n=505 Employers responsible or have a significant input into recruitment and training in SME's & Large Enterprises in England

<sup>17</sup> Q7 Different types of training qualifications: (1) Vocational or Higher Technical Qualifications specific to a job / industry (e.g., IT, engineering, health care, etc.), (2) Data / Digital qualifications / training (e.g., AI, data science, etc.), (3) Management qualifications / training (e.g., operations management, leadership, etc.), (4) Soft skills training (e.g., communication, problem solving, presentation skills, etc.)

## 9) There are marked differences in key areas between large and small employers surveyed in relation to skills needs and attitudes

**This finding highlights the importance of considering the distinct characteristics and requirements of different sized businesses when formulating skills policy.**

There is a significant divergence between the Ipsos and SMG surveys on this, which we believe may be partially attributed to the different profiles of the organisations polled.

One key difference emerged in employer's perceptions of how well government departments responsible for delivering skills and training understand the training needs of organisations like theirs and how engaged they feel. Another difference is the likelihood of using the new foundation and shorter apprenticeships.

### **Government understanding and engagement**

A considerably higher percentage of respondents to the SMG survey (79%, mostly large employers) believed that government departments responsible for delivering skills and training did not understand their training needs well, while 42% of employers in the Ipsos survey have this view (see table 12 in the appendix).

This difference also extends to perceptions of how effectively government departments responsible for skills and training engage with organisations on related policies. 57% of Ipsos respondents reported they felt very well or fairly well engaged with government departments compared to 20% of SMG employers (see table 13 in the appendix). Understanding the reasons behind this could help us apply these strategies elsewhere. It clearly suggests the need for a more nuanced approach to skills engagement.

### **Use of new apprenticeship products**

During the polling period in January and February 2025, some information was available about the new Foundation Apprenticeship and Shorter Apprenticeship products. While the government's definition was shared with respondents, it is important to note that the details provided were limited.

When looking at how likely or unlikely they would be to use Foundation Apprenticeships, **69% of employers surveyed by Ipsos said they would be likely (certain/very/fairly likely) to use them in their organisation in the future** (see table 14 in the appendix). This was 32% for SMG respondents (of which a third comprised of businesses with over 5,000 employees). It is worth noting here that 66% of those surveyed by Ipsos are small or medium sized businesses, and the survey data may reflect the fact that many of the apprenticeships offered by SMEs are at lower levels 2 and 3<sup>18</sup>.

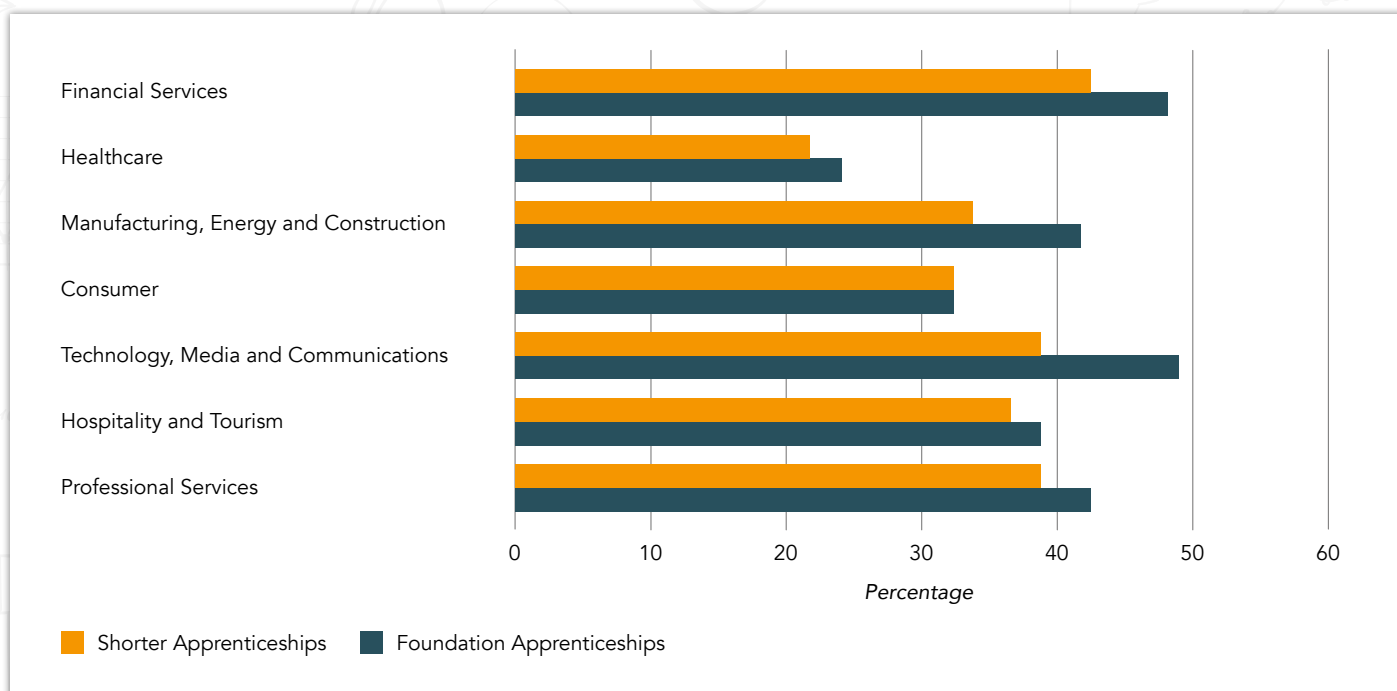
**Larger employers may be more likely to use shorter apprenticeships versus foundation apprenticeships.**

<sup>18</sup> Federation of Small Business (FSB), [\*Protect SME training funds and financial incentives for apprentices, say small firms\*](#), 28.11.24

The SMG survey found that 72% of employers believed these should focus on a combination of **both technical and core workplace skills**. The Ipsos survey found a more even distribution of preferences across technical skills linked to a specific occupation (32%); core workplace skills not linked to a specific occupation (29%) or a combination of both (37%) (see table 16 in the appendix). As a minimum, SMG believes this highlights the need for clear communication about the objectives of Foundation Apprenticeships, especially given the divergent needs among smaller businesses.

**When asked how likely or not they were that they would use 'shorter apprenticeships' in their organisation in the future, 62% of respondents from the Ipsos survey and 50% of SMG respondents said they were 'certain to', 'very likely' or 'fairly likely' to (see table 15 in the appendix).**

**Figure 9:** Employer views on whether they were certain or very likely to use Foundation Apprenticeships or Shorter Apprenticeships by industry (Ipsos)<sup>19 20</sup>



Among those surveyed by Ipsos, employers from the North East (81%) and the North West (81%) were more likely than any other region to say that they were certain, very likely or likely to use Foundation Apprenticeships in the future<sup>21</sup>. Employers from the West Midlands (80%) also indicated similarly high levels of interest in using Foundation Apprenticeships. Similarly, employers from the North East (72%), the North West (69%) and the West Midlands (69%) were more likely than other regions to say that they were certain, very likely or likely to use Shorter Apprenticeships.

<sup>19</sup> Q18 *How likely or unlikely are you to use Foundation Apprenticeships in your organisation in the future?*

Base (Ipsos): Employers responsible or have a significant input into recruitment and training in SME's & Large Enterprises in England: Technology, Media & Communications n=61, Financial Services n=46, Hospitality & Tourism n=36, Professional Services n=51. Healthcare n=33, Consumer n=65, Manufacturing, Energy & Construction n=120

<sup>20</sup> Q19B *How likely or unlikely are you to use Shorter Apprenticeships in your organisation in the future?*

Base (Ipsos): Employers responsible or have a significant input into recruitment and training in SME's & Large Enterprises in England: Technology, Media & Communications n=61, Financial Services n=46, Hospitality & Tourism n=36, Professional Services n=51. Healthcare n=33, Consumer n=65, Manufacturing, Energy & Construction n=120

<sup>21</sup> Q18 *How likely or unlikely are you to use Foundation Apprenticeships in your organisation in the future?*

Base (Ipsos): Employers responsible or have a significant input into recruitment and training in SME's & Large Enterprises in England: North East n=36, North West n=86, Yorkshire and The Humber n=41, West Midlands n=45, East Midlands n=33, East of England n=54, South West n=33, South East n=55, Greater London n=122



There were differences observed across various industries in their likelihood of utilising Foundation and Shorter Apprenticeships. Among those surveyed by Ipsos, employers from the professional services industry (16%) and the financial services industry (15%) were more likely to say that they were certain not to, very unlikely or fairly unlikely to use Foundation Apprenticeships. Similarly, employers from the healthcare industry (24%) and the manufacturing, energy and construction industries (23%) were most likely to say that they were certain not to, very unlikely or fairly unlikely to use Shorter Apprenticeships.

Interestingly, **the likelihood of hiring apprentices in the future does not necessarily determine the use of Foundation or Shorter apprenticeships.** For example, respondents from the manufacturing, energy, and construction sector said that their organisation was certain to or very likely to hire apprentices in the future (79%). However, they were less certain about using foundation or shorter apprenticeships, with only 67% and 42% respectively being certain, likely or very likely to utilise these products.

**The new products may also not be sufficient to persuade those who do not currently participate in apprenticeships to engage in the future.** Ipsos respondents who have never had apprentices before, or do not plan to hire in the future, were very unlikely or certain not to use shorter or foundation apprenticeships. The SMG survey showed less consensus; employers who had never had apprentices were more likely to say they were unlikely to use shorter or foundation apprenticeships. However, there was a small divergence: SMG employers who did not intend to hire apprentices were fairly likely to use Shorter Apprenticeships, but fairly unlikely to use Foundation Apprenticeships.

This may indicate a need for further engagement from the government to fully explain the impact and benefits of these programmes.

These industry-specific variations in the anticipated use of Foundation and Shorter Apprenticeships may suggest that the attractiveness and perceived suitability of the new programmes differs across both sectors and organisations of different sizes. Understanding why the new programmes have more potential traction with smaller employers will be important to their growth and reinforces the broader point that a nuanced approach to skills policy is needed. This is because the needs and attitudes towards training can vary not only by the size of the employer but also by the industry they operate in<sup>22</sup>.

<sup>22</sup> It should be noted that some variations are based on low sample sizes for industry.

## 10) Over 60% of employers surveyed believe skills policy should be coordinated at both a local and national level

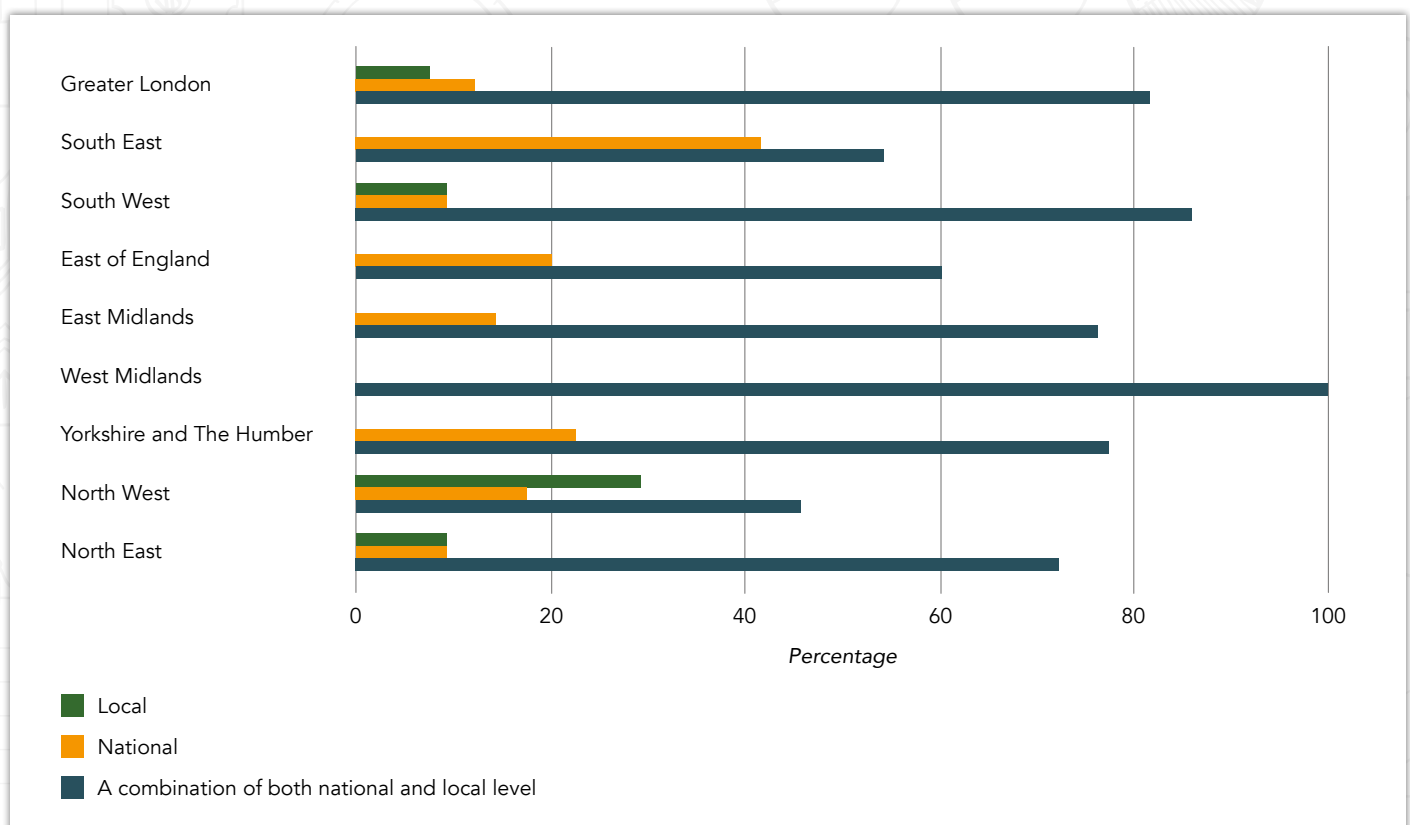
**Employers largely agreed that they would prefer a balance between directing skills policy from the national level and devolving decision making to local government. Among those surveyed by Ipsos, 62% said that they would like to see skills policy coordinated at both a local and national level. Among those surveyed by SMG, 74% said that coordination should take place at both levels.**

Employers surveyed across various regions in England also largely agreed that **skills policy should be coordinated at both a local and national level** (see table 17 in the appendix). The consensus that a dual approach was most beneficial is notable given the size of the regions and the autonomy that some already exercise over skills policy. Among those surveyed by SMG, all the employers from the West Midlands (100%) that responded to this question were in favour of this approach. Similarly, the South West (85%), Greater London (81%), Yorkshire and The Humber (77%), the East Midlands (75%) and the North East (73%) all strongly supported this approach. The North West (45%) was the only region where support for a combined approach fell below 50%, although it was still the most popular response for this region, followed by preference for a local approach (27%) and preference for skills policy to be coordinated at a national level (18%).

In the Ipsos survey, there was a high level of support for a skills policy that is coordinated at both a local and national level among those surveyed from Greater London (64%) (see figure 22 in the appendix). Similarly to the SMG survey, this remained high in all regions, such as the North East (69%), the South East (69%), the East of England (65%) and the North West (62%).

**Employers surveyed recognise the need for a consistent national strategy but also believe local government is well positioned to understand and address specific regional skills needs.**

**Figure 10:** Employer support for coordinating skills policy at both the national and local level by region (SMG)<sup>23 17</sup>



<sup>23</sup> Responses to this question came from a base of 141 respondents (SMG)

Additionally, among those surveyed by Ipsos, **almost every industry group supported the coordination of skills policy at both national and local level**. This included key sectors identified in the government's Industrial Strategy. For example, 71% of those surveyed from the professional services industry were in favour of coordinating policy at the national and local level, as well as 67% in the technology, media and communications industry, and 58% in the manufacturing, energy and construction industry (see figure 21 in the appendix).

The finding indicates that **employers recognise the need for a consistent national strategy** but also believe local government is well positioned to understand and address specific regional skills needs, playing a key role in advocacy and incentivisation to engage with skills programmes. Although this framework already existed prior to the creation of Skills England, the new body provides an opportunity for even greater strategic oversight.

**SMG believes that employers are keen to engage and consult with Skills England on policy development** and the implementation of reforms and advocate for a collaborative model where national strategic direction is complemented by local responsiveness and expertise, to create a system that is both coherent and tailored to specific needs across England.





# Appendix

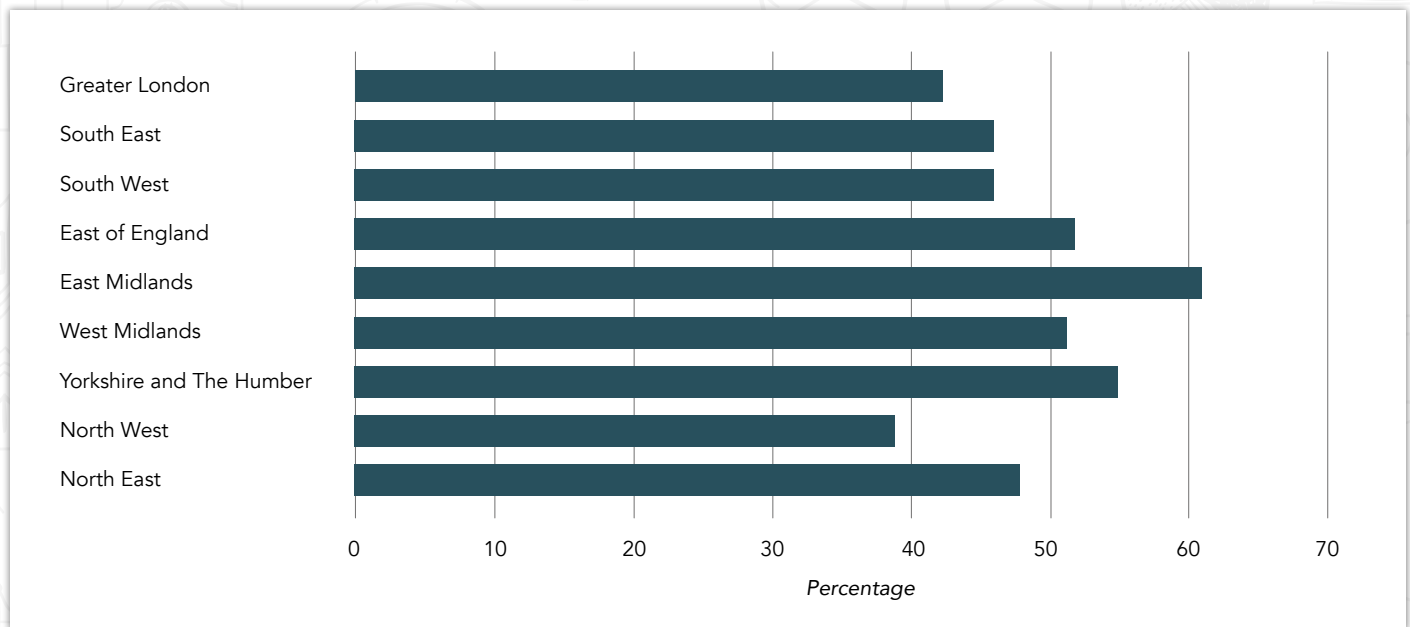
## Technical data for the Ten Key Insights.

1) There is a consensus that a national skills policy needs to target all ages and all levels

**Table 1:** Views on where national skills policy should be focused<sup>24</sup>

Response Choices	SMG (%)	Ipsos (%)
None of these areas would benefit my organisation	1	3
A national skills policy focused on training young people	5	22
A national skill that trains all ages and all skill levels	59	47
A national skills policy focused on specific occupations where there is a shortage of skills	32	27
<u>Don't know</u>	3	1

**Figure 11:** A breakdown by region of employers who favour a national skills policy that trains all ages and all skill levels (Ipsos)<sup>25</sup>



<sup>24</sup> Q12 Thinking about national skills policy, which one, if any, of the following would most benefit your organisation?

Base (Ipsos): n=505 Employers responsible or have a significant input into recruitment and training in SME's & Large Enterprises in England

<sup>25</sup> Q12 Thinking about national skills policy, which one, if any, of the following would most benefit your organisation?

Base (Ipsos): Employers responsible or have a significant input into recruitment and training in SME's & Large Enterprises in England: North East n=36, North West n=86, Yorkshire and The Humber n=41, West Midlands n=45, East Midlands n=33, East of England n=54, South West n=33, South East n=55, Greater London n=122

## 2) When employers have a skills gap in their organisation, they will develop existing employees first

**Table 2:** Typical response if a skills need is identified within an organisation<sup>26</sup>

Response Choices	SMG (%)	Ipsos (%)
Look to develop your existing employees first	54	52
Recruit new experienced hires	22	30
Recruit new, less experienced hires and train them	16	18
Don't know	1	-
Other (please specify)	7	-

**Table 3:** Expected impact of young recruits on a business' productivity<sup>27</sup>

Response Choices	SMG (%)	Ipsos (%)
Immediate term (0-6 months)	7	13
Short term (7-12 months)	27	27
Medium term (1-3 years)	39	43
Long term (3 years+)	23	17
Don't know	5	1

<sup>26</sup> Q1 *What is the typical response if a lack of skills is identified within your organisation?*

Base (Ipsos): n=505 Employers responsible or have a significant input into recruitment and training in SME's & Large Enterprises in England

<sup>27</sup> Q4 *Do you expect skills and training investments in such people to impact business productivity in the...*

Base (Ipsos): n=505 Employers responsible or have a significant input into recruitment and training in SME's & Large Enterprises in England

### 3) It is much harder to recruit individuals with higher level skills than to fill entry level positions

**Table 4:** The extent to which an organisation finds it easy or difficult to recruit for positions requiring certain skills levels<sup>28</sup>

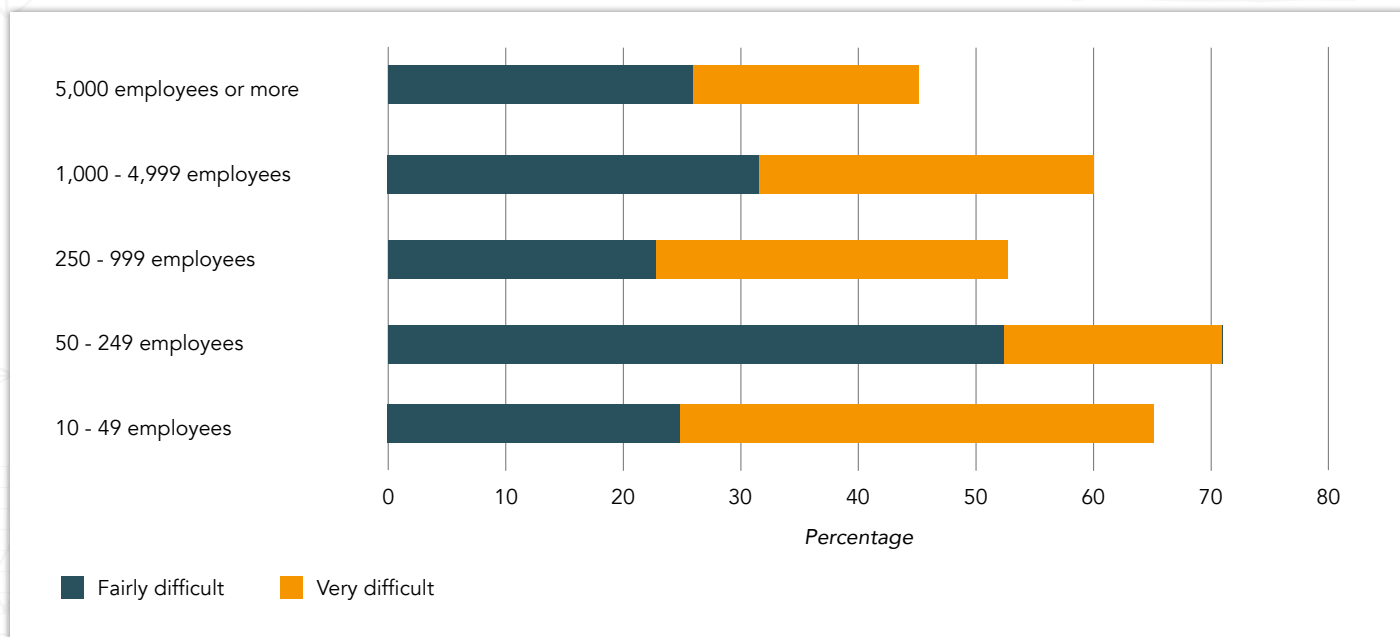
Response Choices (SMG)	Higher level skills (eg specific qualifications, managerial levels, extensive experience etc) (%)	Mid level skills (eg some qualifications, some experience needed etc) (%)	Lower level skills (eg entry level, no previous experience etc) (%)	Response Choices (Ipsos)	Higher level skills (eg specific qualifications, managerial levels, extensive experience etc) (%)	Mid level skills (eg some qualifications, some experience needed etc) (%)	Lower level skills (eg entry level, no previous experience etc) (%)
Very easy	2	6	27	Very easy	13	14	31
Fairly easy	17	28	37	Fairly easy	22	39	43
Neither easy nor difficult	16	24	15	Neither easy nor difficult	16	19	14
Fairly difficult	30	30	14	Fairly difficult	33	25	10
Very difficult	25	6	2	Very difficult	16	3	2
Don't know	9	6	5	Don't know	n/a	n/a	n/a

<sup>28</sup> Q2 To what extent does your organisation find it easy or difficult to recruit for positions requiring ...?

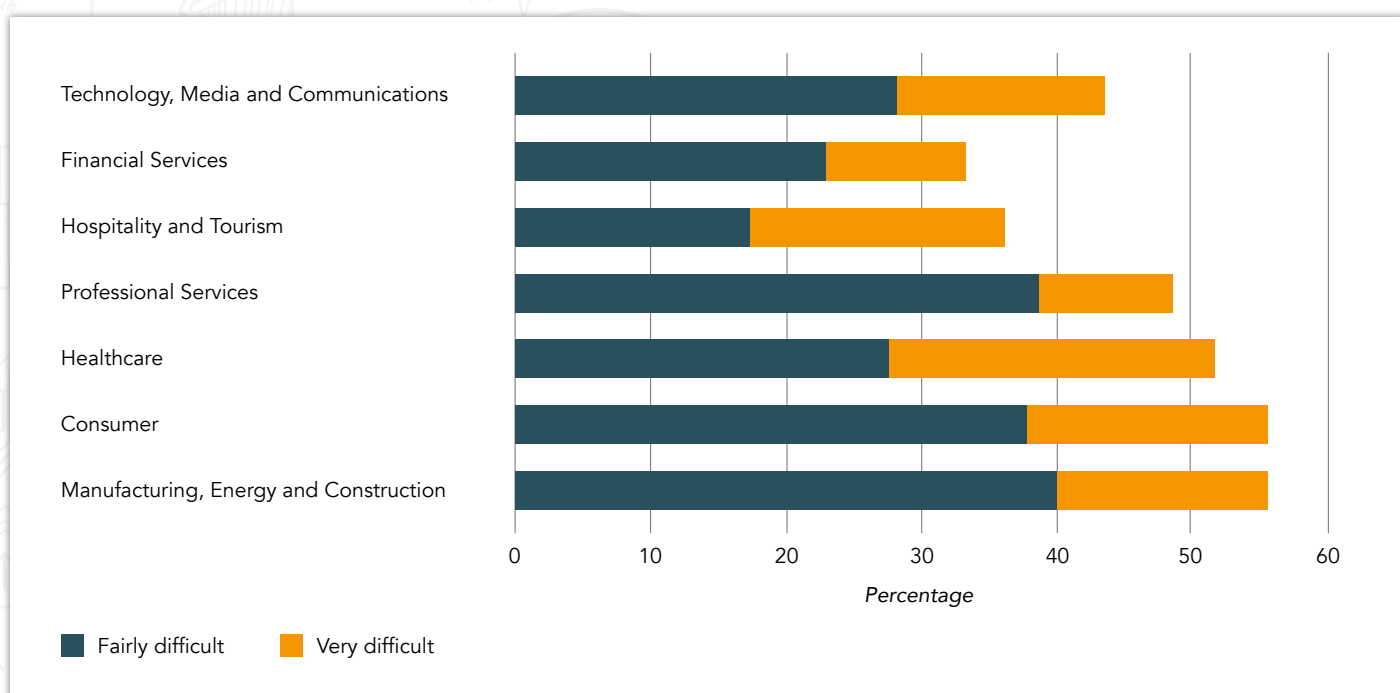
Base (Ipsos): n=505 Employers responsible or have a significant input into recruitment and training in SME's & Large Enterprises in England



**Figure 12:** Views on whether recruiting individuals with higher-level skills is either fairly or very difficult by employer size (SMG)



**Figure 13:** Views on whether recruiting individuals with higher-level skills is either fairly or very difficult by employer size (Ipsos)<sup>29</sup>



<sup>29</sup> Q2 To what extent does your organisation find it easy or difficult to recruit for positions requiring ...Higher level skills (e.g., specific qualifications, managerial levels, extensive experience, etc.)

Base (Ipsos): Employers responsible or have a significant input into recruitment and training in SME's & Large Enterprises in England: Technology, Media & Communications n=61, Financial Services n=46, Hospitality & Tourism n=36, Professional Services n=51. Healthcare n=33, Consumer n=65, Manufacturing, Energy & Construction n=120

#### 4) Most employers find it harder to develop young people's soft skills than technical skills

**Table 5:** The extent to which an organisation finds the development of technical and soft skills easy or difficult<sup>30</sup>

Response Choices (SMG)	Developing the young person's technical skills to do the job (%)	Developing the young person's soft skills to do the job (%)	Response Choices (Ipsos)	Developing the young person's technical skills to do the job (%)	Developing the young person's soft skills to do the job (%)
Very easy	6	4	Very easy	16	18
Fairly easy	52	29	Fairly easy	43	39
Neither easy nor difficult	17	20	Neither easy nor difficult	19	19
Fairly difficult	17	29	Fairly difficult	20	19
Very difficult	1	11	Very difficult	2	3
Don't know	3	3	Don't know	0	0
N/A	4	4	N/A	1	1

<sup>30</sup> Q3 On balance, to what extent do you find each of the following areas of development easy or difficult?

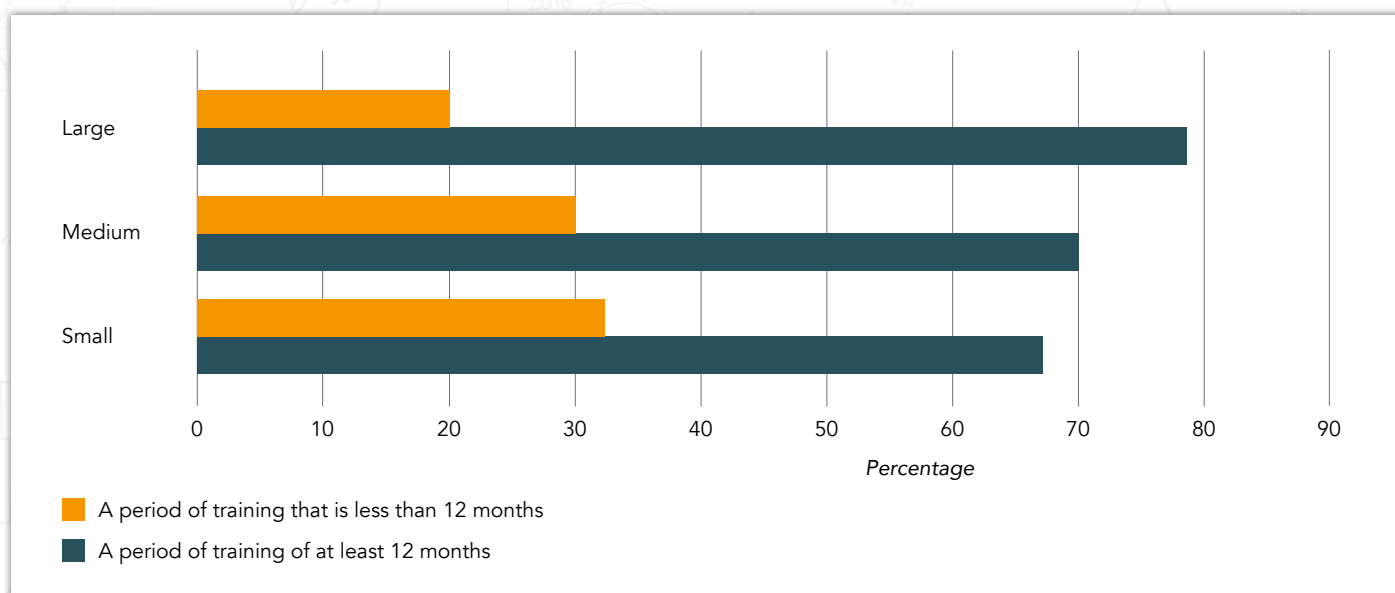
Developing the young person's technical skills to do the job Base (Ipsos): n=505 Employers responsible or have a significant input into recruitment and training in SME's & Large Enterprises in England

## 5) Over 70% of employers surveyed believe an apprenticeship should be at least a year long

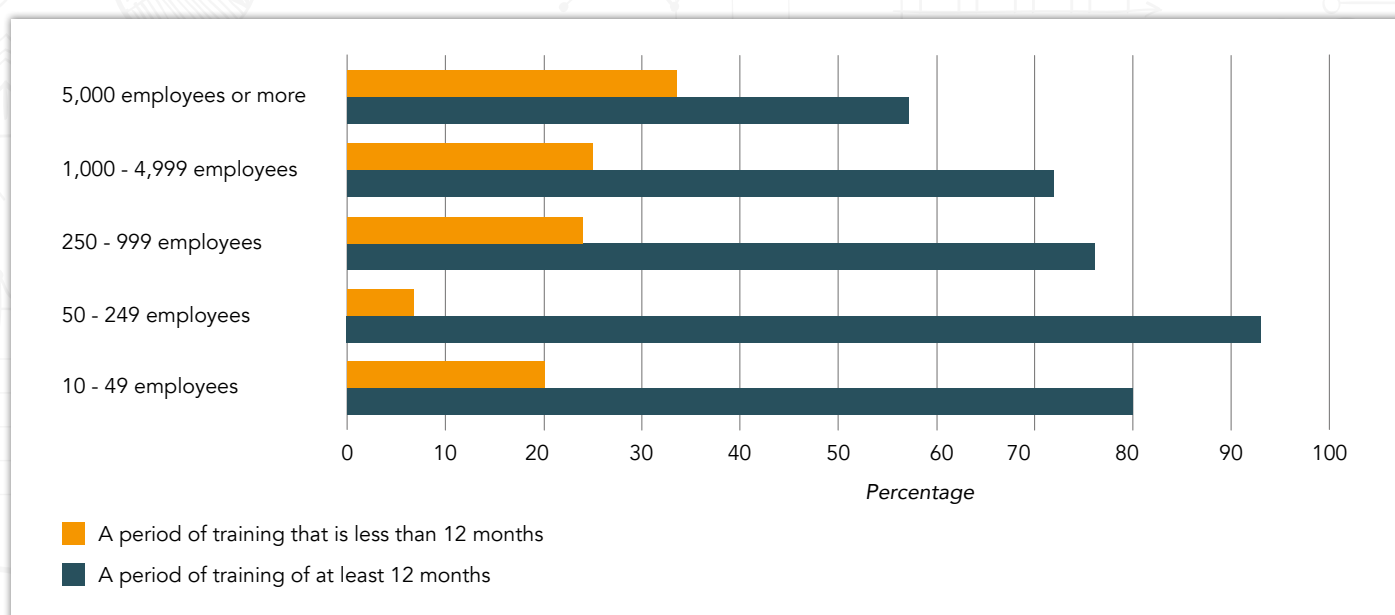
**Table 6:** Views on the minimum length of time for an apprenticeship<sup>31</sup>

Response Choices	SMG (%)	Ipsos (%)
A period of training of at least 12 months	71	73
A period of training that is less than 12 months	25	27
Don't know	4	1

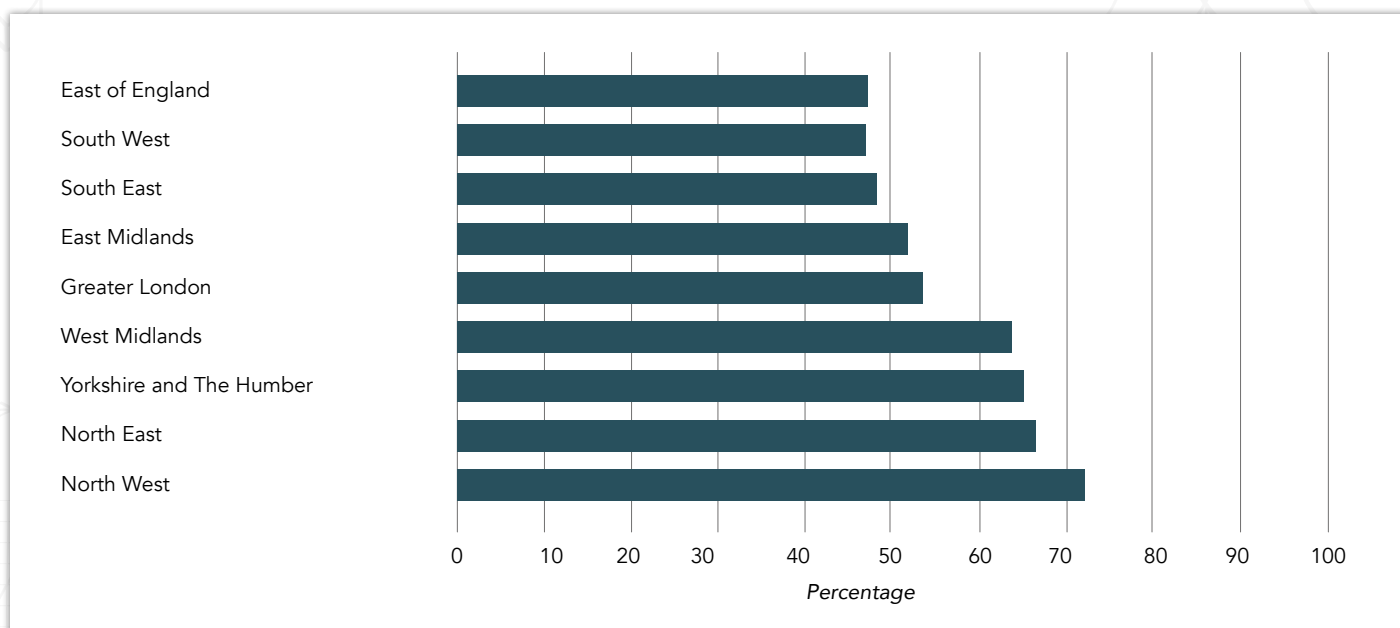
**Figure 14:** Most appropriate length of time for an apprenticeship by size (Ipsos)<sup>32</sup>



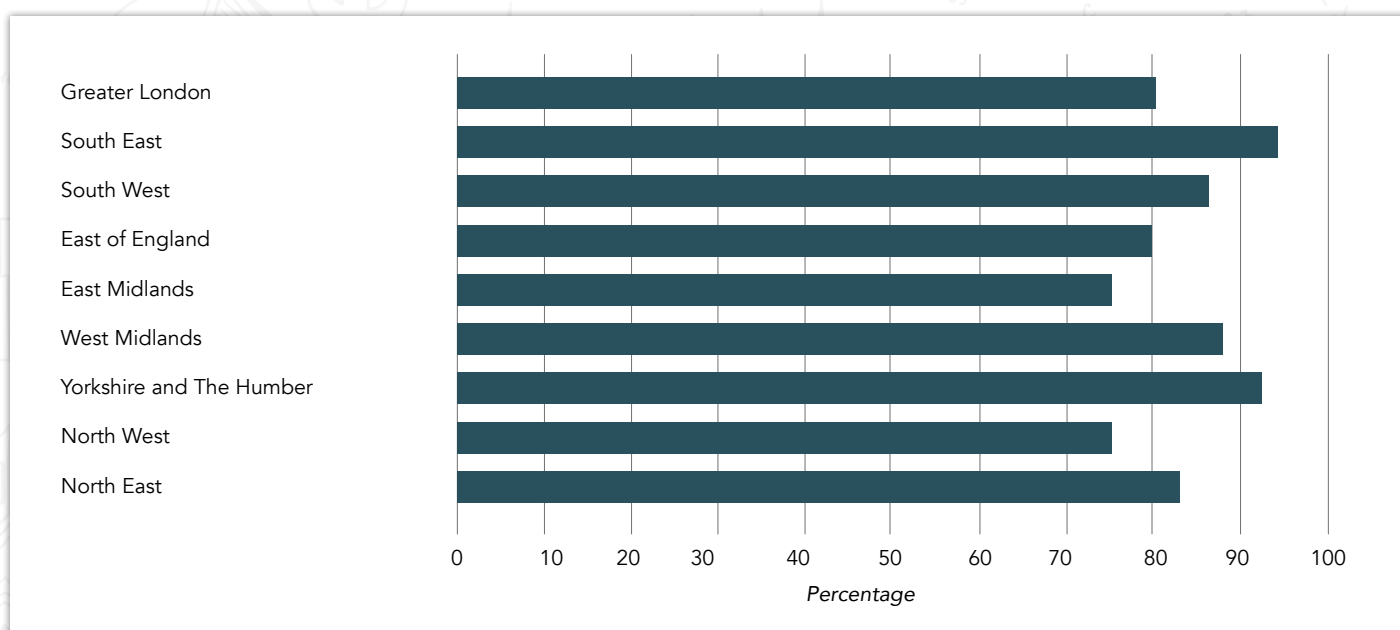
**Figure 15:** Most appropriate length of time for an apprenticeship by size (SMG)<sup>33</sup>



**Figure 16:** Organisations that currently have apprentices on programmes by region (Ipsos)<sup>34</sup>



**Figure 17:** Organisations that currently have apprentices on programmes by region (SMG)<sup>35</sup>



<sup>31</sup> Q10 *Thinking about the minimum duration of an apprenticeship programme, which one of the following do you think is most appropriate?*  
Base (Ipsos): n=505 Employers responsible or have a significant input into recruitment and training in SME's & Large Enterprises in England

<sup>32</sup> Q10 *Thinking about the minimum duration of an apprenticeship programme, which one of the following do you think is most appropriate?*  
Base (Ipsos): Employers responsible or have a significant input into recruitment and training in SME's & Large Enterprises in England who are likely to hire apprentices in their organisation in the future: Small n=109, Medium n=141, Large n=147

<sup>33</sup> Responses to this question from came from a base of 119 respondents

<sup>34</sup> Q6 *Do you currently have apprentices on programmes within your organisation, or not?*  
Base (Ipsos): Employers responsible or have a significant input into recruitment and training in SME's & Large Enterprises in England: North East n=36, North West n=86, Yorkshire and The Humber n=41, West Midlands n=45, East Midlands n=33, East of England n=54, South West n=33, South East n=55, Greater London n=122

<sup>35</sup> Responses to this question from came from a base of 151 respondents (SMG)



## 6) Less than 10% of employers believe creating more university places will support their organisation's growth

**Table 7:** Which of the following initiatives, should the Government prioritise to support employers?<sup>36</sup>

Response Choices	SMG (%)	Ipsos (%)
None of these	10	3
Creating more university places	2	9
Creating more apprenticeship places	40	31
Creating more short courses (ie, short term training courses ranging from a few hours up to a year in length)	37	24
Creating more internships	4	32
Don't know	7	1

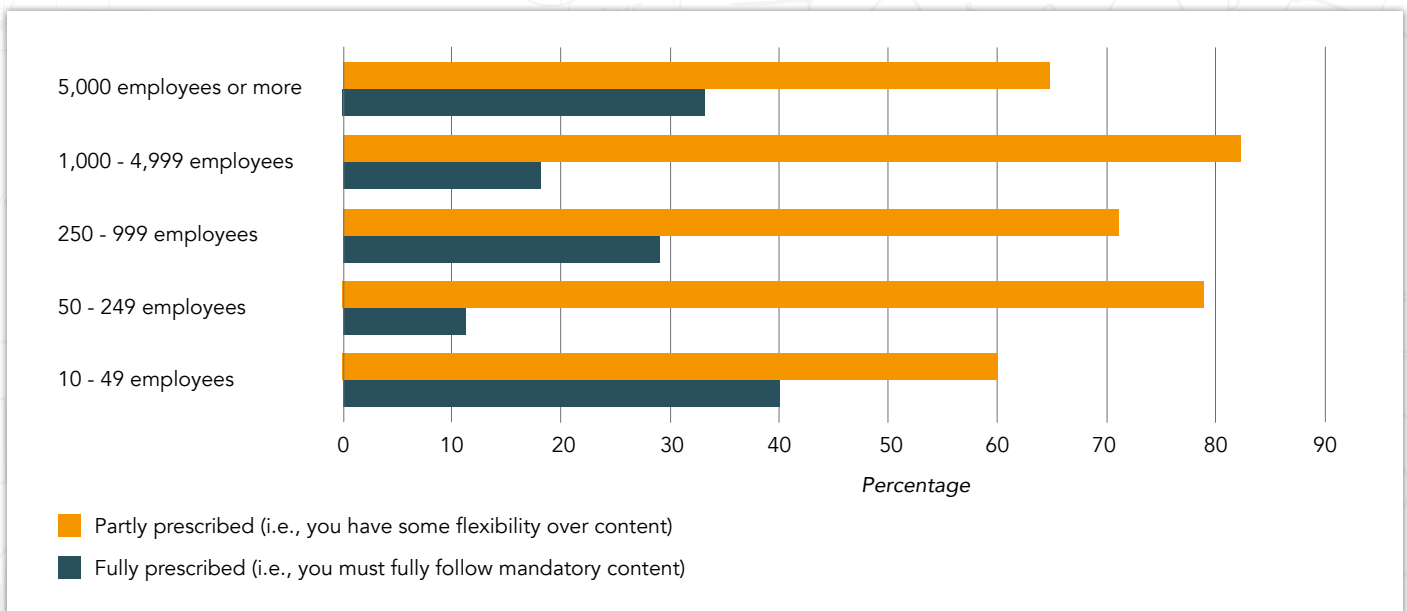
<sup>36</sup> Q14 *In your opinion, which one, if any, of the following initiatives, should the UK government prioritise to help support organisations like yours?*  
 Base (Ipsos): Employers responsible or have a significant input into recruitment and training in SME's & Large Enterprises in England: North East n=36, North West n=86, Yorkshire and The Humber n=41, West Midlands n=45, East Midlands n=33, East of England n=54, South West n=33, South East n=55, Greater London n=122

## 7) Employers want flexibility over the content and structure of skills programmes

**Table 8:** Whether organisations should follow a fully prescribed apprenticeship programme or not<sup>37</sup>

Response Choices	SMG (%)	Ipsos (%)
Fully prescribed (ie, you must follow mandatory context)	27	46
Partly prescribed (ie, you have some flexibility over content)	70	53
Don't know	2	1

**Figure 18:** Employer views on whether an apprenticeship programme should be partially prescribed or fully prescribed by size (SMG)<sup>38</sup>

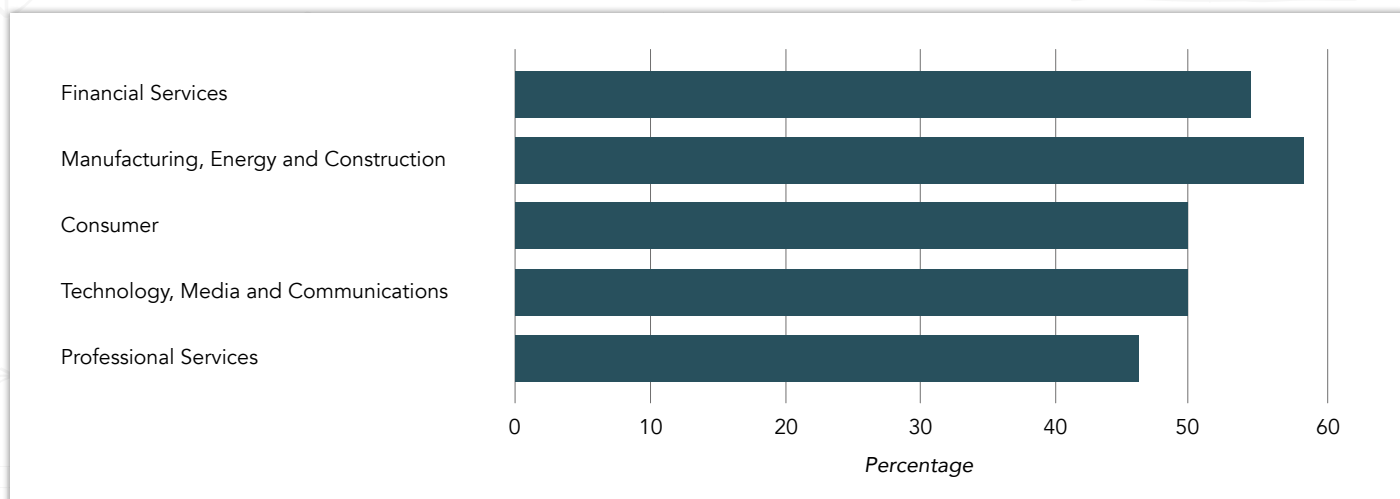


<sup>37</sup> Q8 Do you think organisations like yours should follow an apprenticeship programme that is fully prescribed (i.e., you must fully follow mandatory content), or one that is partly prescribed (i.e., you have some flexibility over content)?

Base (Ipsos): n=397 Employers responsible or have a significant input into recruitment and training in SME's & Large Enterprises in England who are likely to hire apprentices

<sup>38</sup> Responses to this question came from a base of 122 respondents (SMG)

**Figure 19:** Employer views on whether an apprenticeship programme should be partially prescribed by industry (Ipsos)<sup>39</sup>



**Table 9:** Employers preferred approach to sourcing a training provider<sup>40</sup>

Response Choices	SMG (%)	Ipsos (%)
Our organisation can choose training providers independently, without adhering to any pre-approved supplier lists	43	47
Our organisation must select supplier from an established list of approved training providers	53	42
Our organisation is instructed by an authority on which training provider to use	2	10
Don't know	3	2

<sup>39</sup> Q8 *Do you think organisations like yours should follow an apprenticeship programme that is fully prescribed (i.e., you must fully follow mandatory content), or one that is partly prescribed (i.e., you have some flexibility over content)?*

Base (Ipsos): Employers responsible or have a significant input into recruitment and training in SME's & Large Enterprises in England who are likely to hire apprentices: Financial Services n=41, Manufacturing, Energy & Construction n=95, Consumer n=52, Technology, Media & Communications n=52, Professional Services n=41

<sup>40</sup> Q9 *Which one of the following, if any, would be your preferred approach to sourcing a training provider for these programmes?*

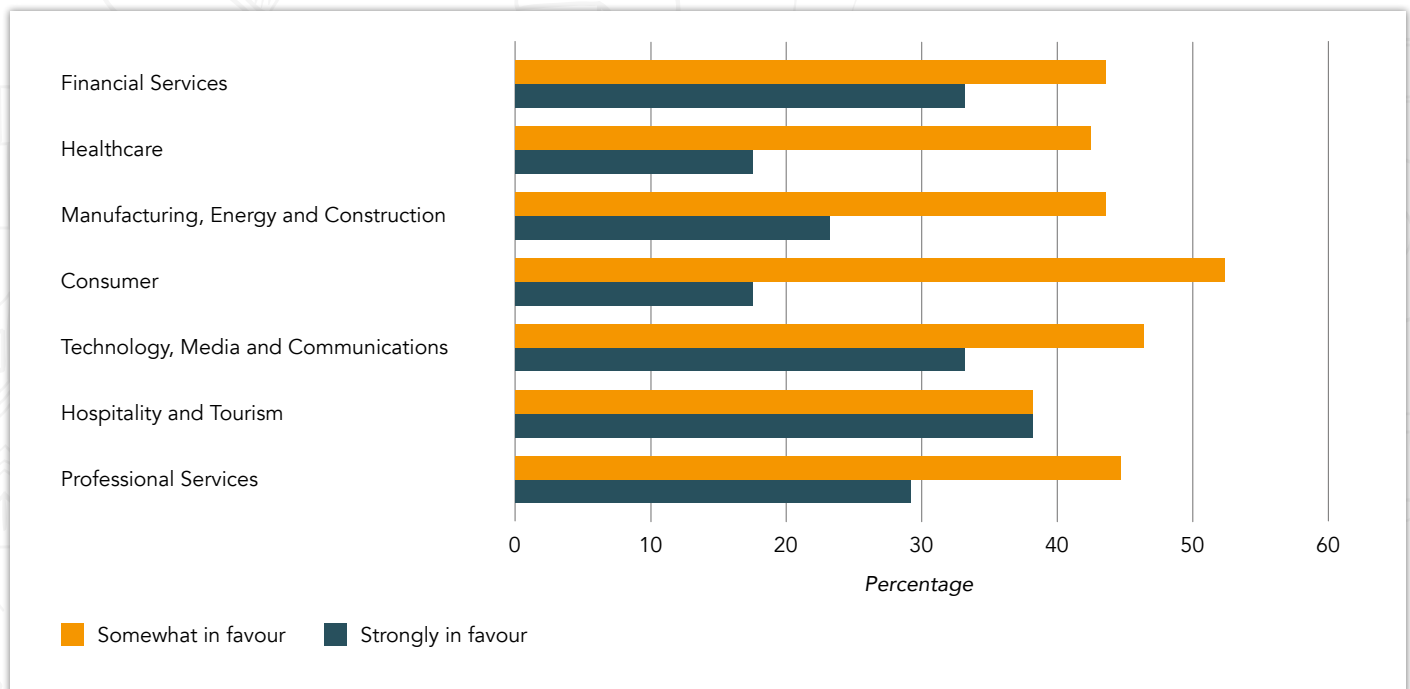
Base (Ipsos): n=397 Employers responsible or have a significant input into recruitment and training in SME's & Large Enterprises in England who are likely to hire apprentices

## 8) Over 65% of employers surveyed believe the new Growth and Skills Levy should be used to fund other professional qualifications and training

**Table 10:** The extent to which employers are in favour of the Growth and Skills Levy<sup>41</sup>

Response Choices	SMG (%)	Ipsos (%)
Strongly in favour	30	25
Somewhat in favour	35	44
No views either way	14	23
Somewhat oppose	13	5
Strongly oppose	6	1
Don't know	4	2

**Figure 20:** Employer views on whether they are strongly or somewhat in favour of the Growth and Skills Levy by industry (Ipsos)<sup>42</sup>



<sup>41</sup> Q15 To what extent are you in favour of or opposed to a new Growth and Skills Levy, which would fund training and other professional qualifications outside of an apprenticeship, or do you have no views either way?

Base (Ipsos): n=505 Employers responsible or have a significant input into recruitment and training in SME's & Large Enterprises in England

<sup>42</sup> ibid



**Table 11:** Employers' views on the types of training they would like to see included in the Growth and Skills Levy<sup>43</sup>

Response Choices	SMG (%)	Ipsos (%)
Vocational or Higher Technical Qualifications specific to a job/industry (eg, IT, engineering, healthcare, etc)	70	62
Soft skills training (eg, communication, problem solving, presentation skills, etc)	71	58
Management qualifications/training (eg, operations management, leadership, etc)	74	58
Data/digital qualifications/training (eg, AI, data science, etc)	68	60
Another type of professional qualification or training (please specify)	26	1
Don't know	0	0

<sup>43</sup> Q16 Which, of the following types of training and other professional qualifications would you like to see included in the new Growth and Skills Levy?

Base (Ipsos): n=346 Employers responsible or have a significant input into recruitment and training in SME's & Large Enterprises in England who are in favour of a new Growth and Skills Levy which would fund training and other professional qualifications outside of an apprenticeship

9) There are marked differences in key areas between large and small employers surveyed in relation to skills needs and attitudes

**Table 12:** Employer views on how well the Government understands their skills needs<sup>44</sup>

Response Choices	SMG (%)	Ipsos (%)
Very well	2	19
Fairly well	12	37
Not very well	55	35
Not at all well	24	7
Don't know	7	2

**Table 13:** Employer views on how well the Government engages with them<sup>45</sup>

Response Choices	SMG (%)	Ipsos (%)
Very well	1	22
Fairly well	19	37
Not very well	41	28
Not at all well	30	10
Don't know	9	3

**Table 14:** Employer likelihood to utilise foundation apprenticeships<sup>46</sup>

Response Choices	SMG (%)	Ipsos (%)
None of the above	0	2
Certain to	3	9
Very likely	9	29
Fairly likely	20	30
Neither likely nor unlikely	16	17
Fairly unlikely	15	8
Very unlikely	12	3
Certain not to	6	2
Don't know	20	1

**Table 15:** Employer likelihood to utilise shorter apprenticeships<sup>47</sup>

Response Choices	SMG (%)	Ipsos (%)
Not applicable	0	1
Certain to	9	7
Very likely	20	25
Fairly likely	21	30
Neither likely nor unlikely	12	17
Fairly unlikely	11	10
Very unlikely	7	6
Certain not to	8	4
Don't know	11	1

**Table 16:** Views on what foundation apprenticeships should be focused on<sup>48</sup>

Response Choices	SMG (%)	Ipsos (%)
Focused on developing specific technical skills linked to a specific occupation	13	33
Focused on core workplace skills that are not linked to a specific occupation	12	29
A combination of both technical skills and core workplace skills	72	38
Don't know	4	1

<sup>44</sup> Q5 *How well, or not, do you think the government departments responsible for delivering skills and training, understand the training needs of organisations like yours?*

Base (Ipsos): n=505 Employers responsible or have a significant input into recruitment and training in SME's & Large Enterprises in England

<sup>45</sup> Q13 *How well, or not, do you think government departments responsible for delivering skills and training are engaging with organisations like yours on government skills policies?*

Base (Ipsos): n=505 Employers responsible or have a significant input into recruitment and training in SME's & Large Enterprises in England

<sup>46</sup> Q18 *How likely or unlikely are you to use Foundation Apprenticeships in your organisation in the future?*

Base (Ipsos): n=505 Employers responsible or have a significant input into recruitment and training in SME's & Large Enterprises in England.

<sup>47</sup> Q19B *How likely or unlikely are you to use Shorter Apprenticeships in your organisation in the future?*

Base (Ipsos): n=505 Employers responsible or have a significant input into recruitment and training in SME's & Large Enterprises in England

<sup>48</sup> Q19A *Which one of the following do you think that these Foundation Apprenticeships should be focused on?*

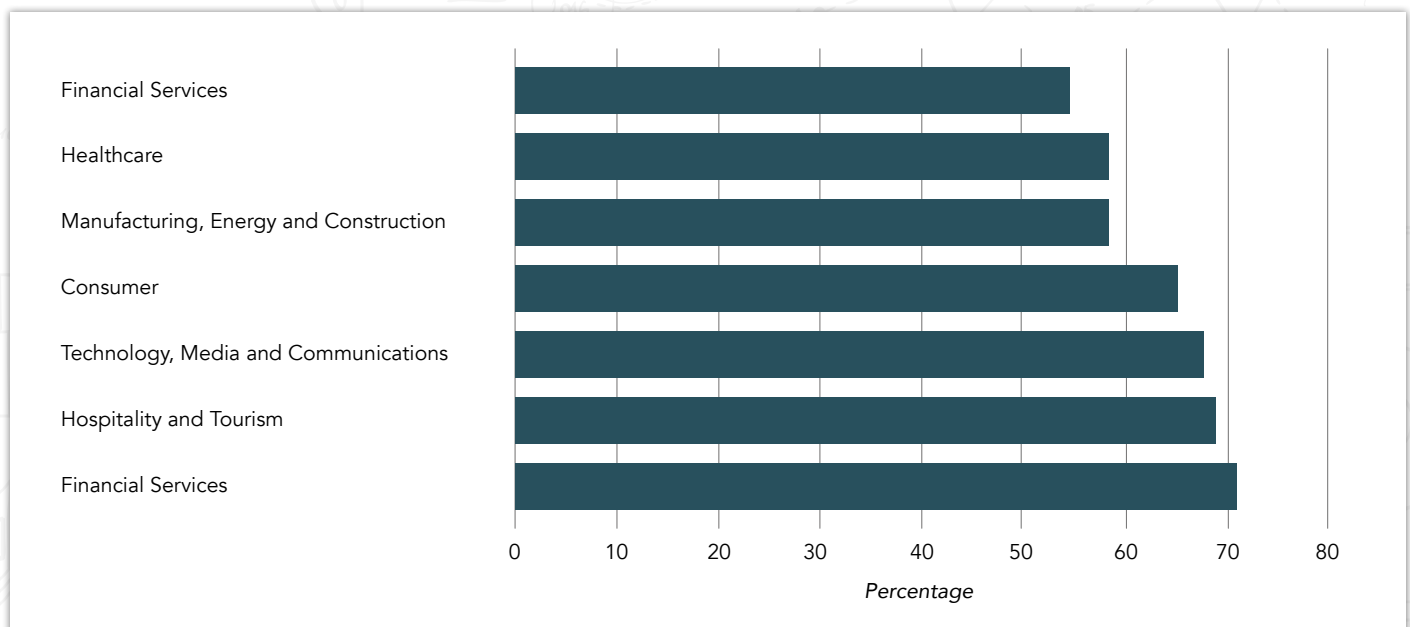
Base (Ipsos): n=505 Employers responsible or have a significant input into recruitment and training in SME's & Large Enterprises in England

10) Over 60% of employers surveyed believe skills policy should be coordinated at both a local and national level

**Table 17:** Whether skills policy should be coordinated at local or national level<sup>49</sup>

Response Choices	SMG (%)	Ipsos (%)
National	16	23
Local	6	14
A combination of both national and local level	74	62
Don't know	4	1

**Figure 21:** Employer support for coordinating skills policy at both the national and local level by industry (Ipsos)<sup>50</sup>



<sup>49</sup> Q17 For organisations like yours, do you think that skills policies should be coordinated by the UK Government at a national level, a local level or should it be a combination of both?

Base (Ipsos): n=505 Employers responsible or have a significant input into recruitment and training in SME's & Large Enterprises in England

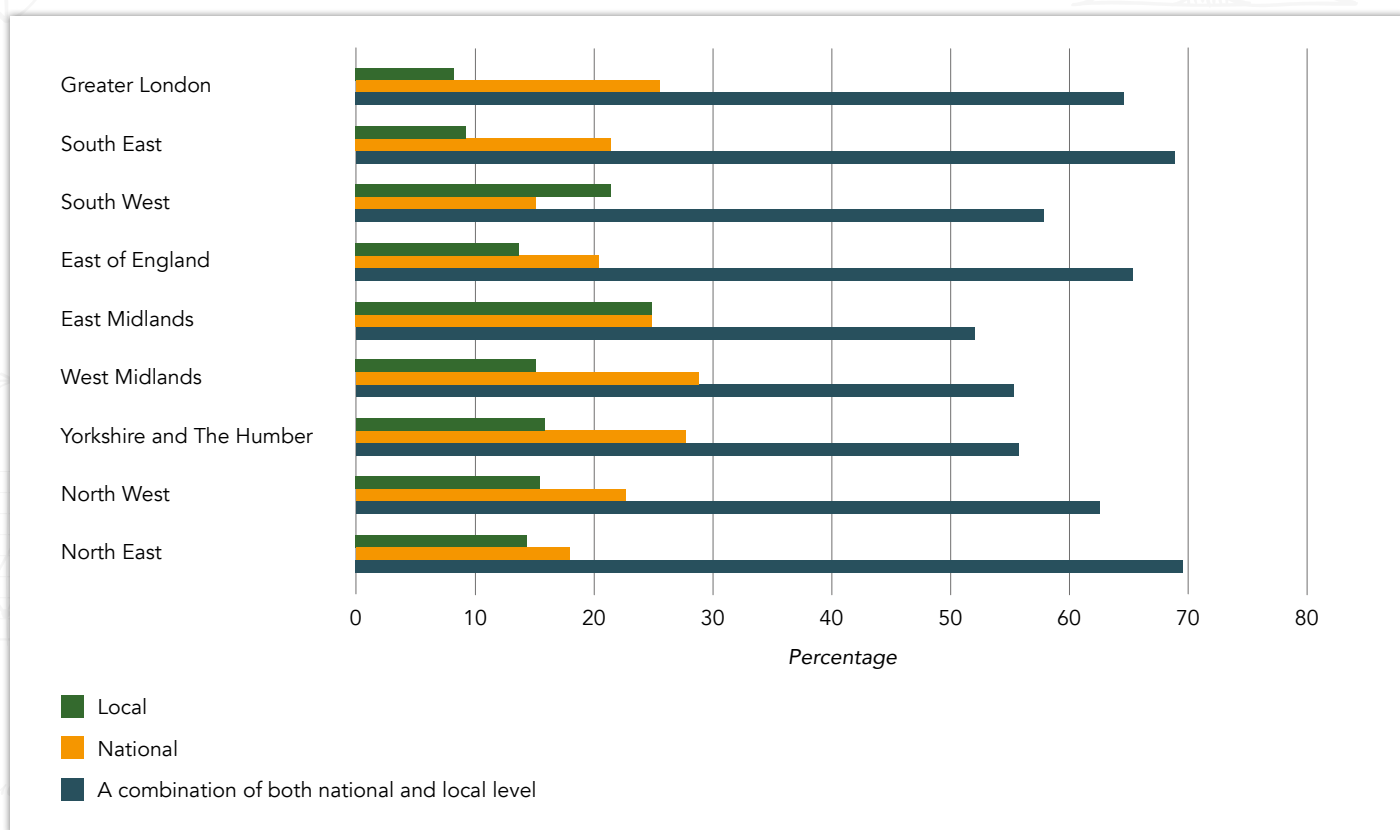
<sup>50</sup> Q17 For organisations like yours, do you think that skills policies should be coordinated by the UK Government at a national level, a local level or should it be a combination of both?

Base (Ipsos): Employers responsible or have a significant input into recruitment and training in SME's & Large Enterprises in England:

Consumer n=65, Hospitality & Tourism n=36, Manufacturing, Energy & Construction n=120, Financial Services n=46, Financial Services n=51



**Figure 22:** Employer support for coordinating skills policy at a local, national and combination of both local and national level by region (Ipsos)<sup>51</sup>



<sup>51</sup> Q17 For organisations like yours, do you think that skills policies should be coordinated by the UK Government at a national level, a local level or should it be a combination of both?

Base (Ipsos): Employers responsible or have a significant input into recruitment and training in SME's & Large Enterprises in England: North East n=36, North West n=86, Yorkshire and The Humber n=41, West Midlands n=45, East Midlands n=33, East of England n=54, South West n=33, South East n=55, Greater London n=122

# Respondent Profile

## Ipsos Survey Sample Profile Breakdown

505 respondents in total

### Company size

- Small – 31% (n=158)
- Medium – 35% (n=178)
- Large – 33% (n=169)

### Industry

- Consumer – 13% (n=65\*)
- Hospitality and Tourism – 7% (n=36\*)
- Manufacturing, Energy and Construction – 24% (n=120)
- Financial Services – 9% (n=46\*)
- Government and Public Services – 5% (n=23\*)
- Healthcare – 7% (n=33\*)
- Technology, Media and Communications – 12% (n=61\*)
- Education – 6% (n=28\*)
- Professional Services – 10% (n=51\*)
- Other – 8% (n=41\*)

### Region

- North East- 7% (n=36\*)
- North West- 17% (n=86\*)
- Yorkshire and The Humber – 8% (n=41\*)
- West Midlands – 9% (n=45\*)
- East Midlands – 7% (n=33\*)
- East of England – 11% (n=54\*)
- South West – 7% (n=33\*)
- South East – 11% (n=55\*)
- Greater London – 24% (n=122)

*\*indicates a low base size*

## SMG Survey Sample Profile Breakdown

320 respondents in total

### Company size

- 2-9 employees – 4.62% (n=9\*)
- 10-49 employees – 12.82% (n=25\*)
- 50-249 employees – 14.87% (n=29\*)
- 250-999 employees – 18.46% (n=36\*)
- 1,000-4,999 employees – 14.87% (n=29\*)
- 5,000 employees or more – 33.85% (n=66\*)

### Industry (183 answered)

- Health and social work – 26.23% (n=48\*)
- Financial services/banking/insurance – 13.11% (n=24\*)
- Education – 10.93% (n=20\*)
- Charity and voluntary – 8.74% (n=16\*)
- Technology – 5.46% (n=10\*)
- Construction – 4.37% (n=8\*)
- Manufacturing – 3.28% (n=6\*)
- Government/public administration – 3.28% (n=6\*)
- Aerospace and defence – 2.73% (n=5\*)
- Engineering – 2.73% (n=5\*)
- Property – 2.19% (n=4\*)
- Administration – 1.64% (n=3\*)
- Energy and utilities – 1.64% (n=3\*)
- Hospitality and leisure – 1.64% (n=3\*)
- Retail – 1.64% (n=3\*)
- Transport/logistics/storage – 1.64% (n=3\*)
- Professional services – 1.09% (n=2\*)
- Telecommunications – 1.09% (n=2\*)
- Arts and media – 0.55% (n=1\*)
- Legal – 0.55% (n=1\*)
- Mining – 0.55% (n=1\*)
- Recruitment industry – 0.55% (n=1\*)
- Travel and tourism – 0.55% (n=1\*)

### Region

- Greater London – 30.77% (n=56\*)
- South West – 19.23% (n=35\*)
- South East – 12.64% (n=23\*)
- North East – 8.24% (n=15\*)
- Yorkshire and the Humber – 8.24% (n=15\*)
- North West – 7.14% (n=13\*)
- East Midlands – 5.49% (n=10\*)
- West Midlands – 4.95% (n=9\*)

*\*indicates a low base size*

# About



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.

The Group brings together stakeholders from some of the UK's leading employers, training providers and awarding organisations. Collectively, the Group supports 17% of apprenticeship delivery across the country, and over 1.7 million employees. Since its formation five years ago, SMG has worked with government and wider sector stakeholders to provide evidence-based, practical solutions for sustainability, quality and growth in apprenticeships and skills.



Ipsos is a multinational market research and consulting firm that uses the best of science, technology and know-how to produce highly accurate and relevant information.

The Ipsos survey research was carried out by Ipsos on behalf of The St Martin's Group in January 2025.

Ipsos was responsible for the data collection element of the study and The St Martin's Group responsible for the survey design, reporting and interpretation of results.

**SMG thanks The 5% Club and CBI for their contribution to the SMG survey which was shared with their members.**

