

Science Industry Partnership

A SKILLS MANIFESTO FOR THE SCIENCE INDUSTRIES:

Four priorities for technical education and
workplace learning



SIP

A SKILLS MANIFESTO FOR THE SCIENCE INDUSTRIES: FOUR PRIORITIES FOR TECHNICAL EDUCATION AND WORKPLACE LEARNING

Effective technical education is a critical component of a thriving UK science sector, providing the workforce expertise necessary to narrow skills gaps, drive-up productivity, and support social mobility.

Although highly qualified, the UK workforce remains unbalanced with a well-documented shortage of technical skills against an over-expansion of higher education relative to demand. Employers require a better balance that increases the availability of sought-after, work-ready technical skills.

A workforce proficient in technical skills supports innovation and competitiveness and ensures the UK is well equipped to tackle some of society's biggest challenges. From transitioning to a low carbon economy and powering next-generation nuclear reactors to developing life-enhancing health care solutions. Our science industries are creating the jobs of tomorrow and have the potential to change our world.

Focusing on current apprenticeship and technical education policy in England, this manifesto outlines four key recommendations that would enable the UK science sector to take significant strides forward to secure the skills needed now and in the future.

About Science Industry Partnership

The Science Industry Partnership (SIP) is a powerful employer led membership alliance. Our vision is to help secure the future growth and development of a highly skilled, world-class workforce for the science industries. We do this by providing our members - from the largest to the smallest - with the opportunities to collaborate, influence and grow our sector together.

Through the power of one collective voice, SIP members speak out on the skills challenges affecting your workforce. Ensuring science industry employers are empowered with a strong voice to shape the skills agenda, influencing policy makers on the unique challenges we face in our sector.

SIP is powered by Cogent Skills, a not-for profit skills specialist committed to raising the bar on skills across science and technology.



SUMMARY

- ① **MAKE THE APPRENTICESHIP
LEVY WORK FOR EMPLOYERS**
- ② **KEEP EMPLOYERS AT THE
HEART OF APPRENTICESHIP
STANDARD DESIGN**
- ③ **INCREASE EQUITY THROUGH
DIVERSE CAREER PATHWAYS**
- ④ **SUPPORT SMEs TO BUILD A
FUTURE READY WORKFORCE**

MAKE THE APPRENTICESHIP LEVY WORK FOR EMPLOYERS

Financing of Skills Needs

Fair funding

Fair funding for apprenticeship standards to enable high-quality delivery. Apprenticeships must be fully funded to maintain a high-quality experience for all involved. Reductions in fundable costs will detrimentally impact individuals as they won't provide the same level or quality of training experience as before, and employers will be disincentivised to use apprenticeships.

Understand the value of globally recognised and accredited qualifications

Understand the value of globally recognised and accredited qualifications amongst science employers and learners, and include them within levy fundable activity. Ensuring the right level and depth of knowledge is critical for maintaining parity of esteem and advancing social mobility. The SIP Apprenticeship Survey 2022 report reveals how two-thirds of science sector employers describe themselves as either 'moderately concerned' (20.51%) or 'extremely concerned' (46.15%) over the general trend to remove qualifications from apprenticeship standards.

Invest in more support for SMEs

Invest in more support for the SME community, including enhanced incentives for taking on apprentices, removing co-investment contributions, and providing a dedicated support service to provide a one-stop resource for the skills landscape. Practical support to enhance understanding and uptake, including the offer of a fully managed service to encourage apprenticeship starts.

Widen the apprenticeship levy

Widen the apprenticeship levy to include up to 10% for the use of short courses and alternative qualifications that would support a more diverse and highly skilled workforce enabling employers to use their funds to pay for high-quality alternative training opportunities for individuals. The SIP Apprenticeship Survey 2022 report reveals that 69.44% of science sector employers want the ability to spend their levy funds on non-apprenticeship training (i.e. Continuing Professional Development and short courses), making it the most desired potential flexibility to the current apprenticeship system.

Relax off-the-job training requirement for existing employees

"To encourage more use of apprenticeships as an internal development tool, relax the off-the-job requirements for existing employees to ensure continued productivity. Existing employees who are committed to their CPD are committed to learning in their own time, so the relaxation of current rules could support increased uptake of apprenticeships for upskilling, offering more progression opportunities in the future. The SIP Apprenticeship Survey 2022 shows that approximately one-third (32.14%) of science sector employers currently using apprenticeships to upskill or retrain their existing employees want to see a relaxation of the 20% off-the-job training requirement.



KEEP EMPLOYERS AT THE HEART OF APPRENTICESHIP STANDARD DESIGN

Maintaining Quality of Apprenticeship Design

Degree Apprenticeship Policy

Degree-level apprenticeships have been widely welcomed and supported since their creation. Many companies are investing in them more each year as part of their early talent plans, as well as using them to upskill existing staff. There have been approximately 1,070 starts on apprenticeships at Level 6+ within the science sector in the three years between 2018/19 and 2020/21.¹ Industry has continued to express concerns over the revised Degree Apprenticeship policy. The SIP Apprenticeship Survey 2022 report shows that nearly one-third (30.30%) of science sector employers agreed that degree-level policy changes make them nervous for the future.

They want to ensure:

- Current branding for degree apprenticeships is maintained and not diluted as an overarching brand for recruitment and upskilling.
- No narrowing of content to ensure the same breadth and depth of knowledge is maintained on a level with graduates in terms of expertise being delivered, and to not narrow the scope for future apprenticeship programmes, which may be needed to address skills needs.
- Protection of the assessment mechanism due to the popularity of independent end-point assessment within the current programme structure.

Safeguards for high-quality knowledge statements

Apprenticeship standard design needs to retain safeguards for high-quality knowledge statements to ensure rigour is applied to teaching requirements. Explicit knowledge should be at the forefront of occupational standard structure so that learners develop the knowledge required for their jobs.

Maintain trust in the system

Apprenticeship programmes are now recognised by employers as a genuine route to building a career in industry where apprentices can progress at the same pace as graduates. Industry needs to maintain trust in the system if this equality of opportunity is to continue and learners can utilise global career structures. Most importantly, employers need stability and clarity to continue to invest and develop their workforce in the UK.

A pragmatic approach to funding

A pragmatic approach to funding should be taken when training providers map content into training plans. Many providers remain committed to including qualifications in apprenticeship programmes, and they need an open approach during audits to reduce the risk of funding clawbacks.

Protect the quality and consistency of options

Protecting the quality and consistency of options within apprenticeships is vital. Employers do not want to see a two-tiered approach due to additional funding requirements/non-levy costs, which could detrimentally impact learners, especially from SME companies.

¹Department for Education: Apprenticeships in England by industry characteristics, Academic Year 2020/21

INCREASE EQUITY THROUGH DIVERSE CAREER PATHWAYS

Safeguarding Alternative Entry Routes into Science

Give T-Levels time to embed

Giving T-Levels time to embed into the skills system should be a priority before the removal/phasing out of funding of alternative programmes, including BTEC qualifications. Defunding risks could alienate pockets of learners from entering and advancing their careers in the science industry.

Safeguard qualifications to be utilised across the entire UK

Safeguarding qualifications within apprenticeships across the entire UK should be a key consideration. If qualifications continue to be removed from apprenticeships, awarding bodies will be impacted and will be unable to commit to the upkeep and ongoing development, which could force qualifications to close and result in a reduction of choice for learners. This could have a marked impact on the devolved nations due to the use of qualifications within their apprenticeship frameworks.

No geographical gaps

Within the levelling up agenda there must be no geographical gaps of opportunity for individuals. Placements are a fundamental element of a T-Level programme, and consideration of any gaps in placement opportunities must be addressed before removing alternative provision.

Enhanced transparency and progression opportunities

There needs to be enhanced transparency of data so that employers can support individuals who want to undertake T-Levels and need placement opportunities. There also needs to be an increase in the number of progression opportunities available so that no one is disadvantaged.



SUPPORT SMEs TO BUILD A FUTURE READY WORKFORCE

Stimulating SME Engagement on Skills

SMEs have been disincentivised due to funding and apprenticeship design changes in the past five years. Across all industries, the number of apprenticeship starts at SMEs fell by 50% between 2015/16 and 2020/21; in the science sector, the number has dropped by nearly 72%, limiting growth and opportunities for individuals.² SMEs often bring innovative ideas to fruition and are a breeding ground of talent for larger organisations. They account for over 97% of companies within the UK science sector.³

Dedicated SME support service

SMEs need support to understand the skills landscape and the options available to them. A dedicated SME support service specifically designed for the science sector, could act as a one-stop shop for workforce skills. Offering end-to-end support, managing existing staff and exploring new development opportunities as well as shaping apprenticeship strategies and up taking T-Level placement support opportunities.

Enhanced incentives

Enhanced incentives, which could consist of completion incentives, providing maintenance loans to support relocation costs or purchasing equipment/materials for their studies, may help smaller and micro businesses recruit apprentices.

Remove the 5% co-investment

Removing the 5% co-investment contribution could level the playing field and ensure that there is no two-tiered approach to the apprenticeship offer. For some micro and small businesses, the co-investment model is still a significant cost which makes taking on apprentices less appealing, especially considering that employers still have to pay the apprentices wages and lose them for 20% of their time for off-the-job training



²Department for Education: Apprenticeships in England by industry characteristics, Academic Year 2020/21

³Department for Business, Energy & Industrial Strategy: Business Population Estimates for the UK and the Regions 2021



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