The Big Conversation

Stakeholder Insight Gathering

A Qualitative Analysis

June 2023

Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education

Contents

Abbreviations

Abbreviation	Definition
DfE	Department for Education
EPA	End Point Assessment
EPAO	End Point Assessment Organisation
FE	Further Education
HE	Higher Education
HEP	Higher Education Provider
IAG	Information, Advice and Guidance
IfATE	The Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education
SME	Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises
STEM	Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics

Executive summary

The big conversation involved over 2000 stakeholders through engagement at events and targeted conversations with IfATE employees. This report focuses on the qualitative data captured from 562 focused conversations with 1,547 stakeholders. Stakeholders represented views from across sectors and organisation types.

The conversations were built around three core and three optional questions. The core three questions and the top themes from responses were:

"What role do you need technical qualifications (like apprenticeships, T levels and higher technical qualifications) to play for you?"

- Enabling employers to meet workforce needs through attraction of new talent and reskilling of existing staff to a recognised standard

- Professional development and upskilling of existing labour pool

- Providing employers with confidence in technical education qualifications

- Providing high quality pathways which are not 'traditional academia'

- Providing employees with confidence in their technical qualification

What do you think is already working in the skills system that we should keep?

- Employer role in developing and maintaining technical education is highly important

- Structure and support of the skills system helps users navigate the technical education landscape

- The levy helps to ensure a focus on apprenticeships

- The End Point Assessment (EPA) works well

- The variety of technical education is positive as it provides options

What do you think needs to change in the skills system to help employers recruit staff with the right skills?

- The need for technical education to be viewed as equally attractive as 'traditional academia'

- The need for guidance and flexibility when using the apprenticeship levy

- Larger employers raised the apprenticeship levy more than SMEs

- Greater simplification of the infrastructure of the skills system

- Larger employers raised this point more than SMEs

- More support is needed for employers when navigating the skills system

- Employers raised employer support more than non-employers

- More flexibility within the skills system is needed (progression and transferability)

- More support for SMEs in the skills system

IfATE gained valuable input to understand the challenges still facing users of the skills system and focus our response to help build a skills system that delivers for employers, learners and the country.

Background

As part of the Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education's (IfATE) commitment to listening and learning, the big conversation is the largest insight-gathering exercise completed by IfATE to date.

The big conversation involved over 2000 stakeholders through engagement at events, workshops, site visits and targeted conversations with IfATE employees.

This report focuses on the qualitative data captured from 562 focused conversations with 1,547 stakeholders. This engagement happened from October 2022 to January 2023. This included large employers, small to medium sized enterprises (SMEs), training providers, professional, statutory or regulatory bodies (PSRBs), trade associations, learners and apprentices, national or local government, awarding organisations, think tanks and End Point Assessment Organisations (EPAOs).

These findings are one of the pieces of evidence used to inform the ['A Simpler Skills System'](#) document.

A further objective of the big conversation was to enable IfATE to broaden its influence by actively seeking input from both new and established stakeholders. As the voice of employers in the skills system, IfATE works with employers of all sizes to approve and maintain the occupational standards. IfATE is also responsible for approving government-funded apprenticeships at levels 2 to 7, and technical qualifications at levels 2 to 5, including T Levels.

As well as this, IfATE procures and manages the contracts with awarding organisations for T Levels and provide advice on the maximum funding available for apprenticeships. Exercises like the big conversation insight gathering are essential for IfATE to engage with a range of stakeholders first hand.

Thank you to everyone who was involved in the big conversation 2022-23. IfATE values your input and has used this information to form the 'A Simpler Skills System' document.

Methodology

This report presents a qualitative analysis of the big conversation, providing an in-depth exploration of the key themes. Qualitative data is particularly useful in providing valuable insights and explanations into the experiences, attitudes, beliefs, and behaviours of stakeholders. By capturing the range and diversity of views, this method generates non-numerical data that offers a more nuanced understanding of the issues. This approach was selected to foster deeper and more organic conversations, rather than a formal consultation that may have limited the richness of the data.

The evidence gathering consisted of: set-up, data collection and analysis and reporting.

Set up

Evidence gathering involved promoting the big conversation publicly via IfATE's social media channels, Twitter and LinkedIn. IfATE members of staff were also encouraged to have conversations with stakeholders they regularly engaged with and other contacts in their personal networks, for example, previous employers.

All the conversations were entered into an online form, using a platform called 'cognito'. The results were downloaded into a MS Excel file and analysed.

Data collection

Between October 2022 and January 2023 IfATE held 562 big conversations with 1547 stakeholders. Most of the conversations were one to one, and some were with groups of stakeholders. They were held virtually via MS Teams, in person, or at events with multiple stakeholders.

Stakeholders could select that their remit was across multiple types or routes, therefore the total number of cognito forms in the bar charts and tables add up to more than 562.

Responses by stakeholder type
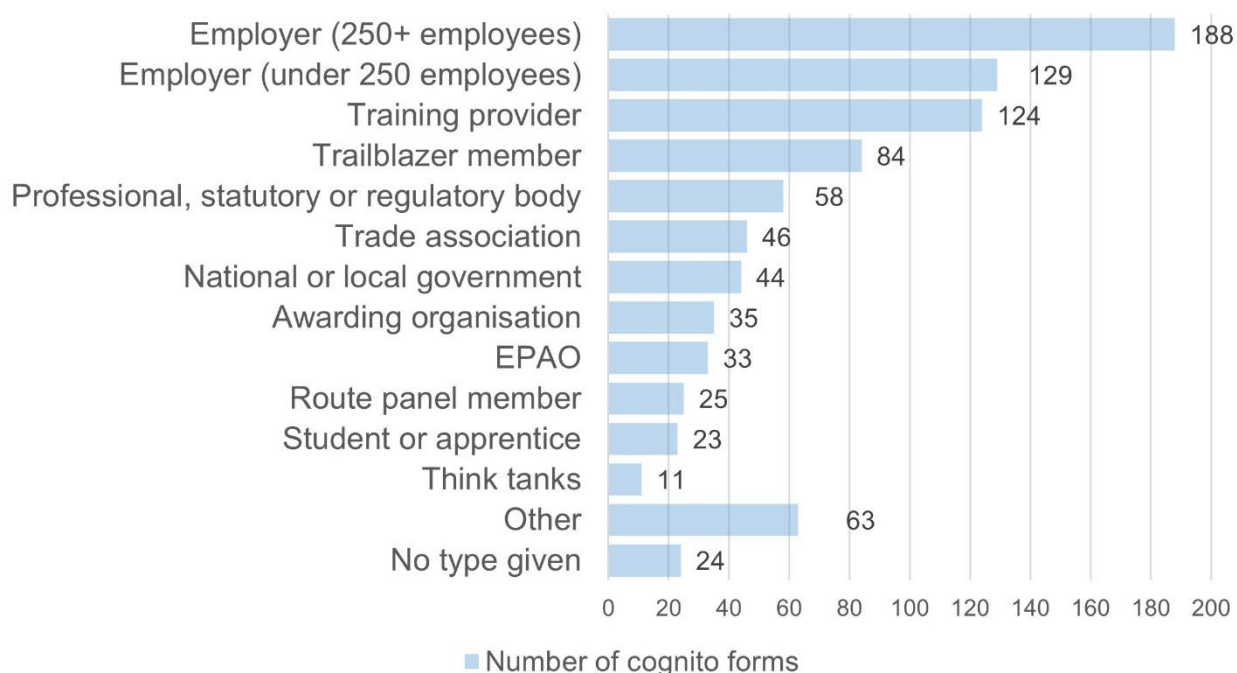
Response stakeholder type	Number of cognito forms
Employer (250+ employees)	188
Employer (under 250 employees)	129
Training provider	124
Trailblazer member	84
Professional, statutory or regulatory body	58
Trade association	46
National or local government	44
Awarding organisation	35
EPAO	33
Route panel member	25
Student or apprentice	23
Think tanks	11
Other	63
No type given	24

There was coverage across all of the [15 occupational routes](#).

Responses by route
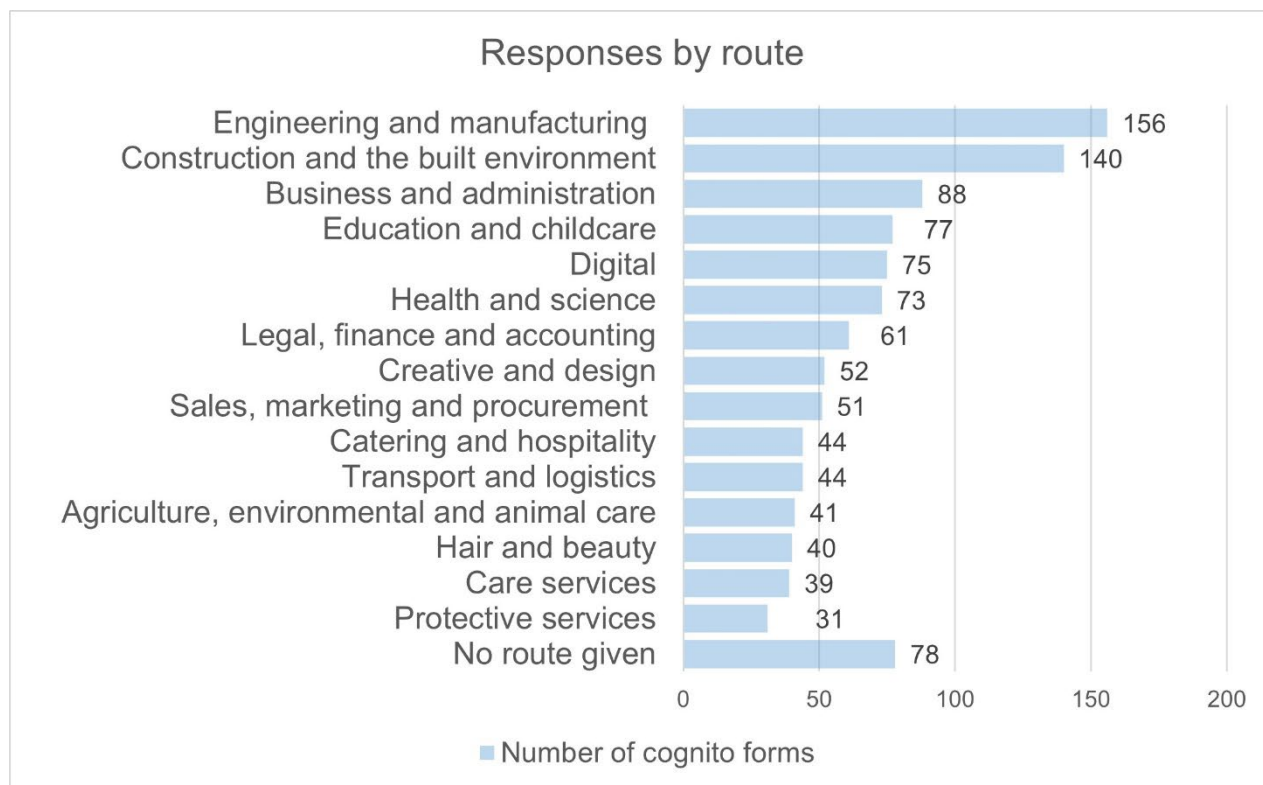
Response stakeholder type	Number of cognito forms
Engineering and manufacturing	156
Construction and the built environment	140
Business and administration	88
Education and childcare	77
Digital	75
Health and science	73
Legal, finance and accounting	61
Creative and design	52
Sales, marketing and procurement	51
Catering and hospitality	44
Transport and logistics	44
Agriculture, environmental and animal care	41
Hair and beauty	40
Care services	39
Protective services	31
No route given	78

Insight-gathering questions asked

Stakeholders were asked questions about their stakeholder type and what region they were based in. IfATE employees used a semi-structured approach to conversations and were guided by the response the stakeholder gave.

Conversations were based around three core questions:

1. What role do you need technical qualifications (like apprenticeships, T levels and higher technical qualifications) to play for you?

2. What do you think is already working in the skills system that we should keep?

3. What do you think needs to change in the skills system to help employers recruit staff with the right skills?

More informed stakeholders were also asked:

4. The workforce is changing. Do you think the skills system needs to change anything to help employers respond to future national challenges e.g. EDI, green skills, emerging skills?

5. Imagine you have skills needs as an employer or training needs as an individual. What do you do to address these at the moment, and what would help you address them better in the future?

Thematic analysis

Thematic analysis groups similar content into broad themes, revealing the frequency of themes. One point to note is that the frequency of themes does not present the 'strength of sentiment', for example 50 people could have mentioned a topic passionately, whilst 100 could have mentioned another topic more passively. This was an inductive approach, where IfATE had no pre-decided themes or specifics.

The thematic analysis six step process:

1. Famililarisation – Each question was analysed individually and responses were read through with initial notes being taken to gain an overview of the data gathered.

2. Coding – Sections of text with key phrases or ideas were highlighted and given labels (codes) to describe the content in shorthand. As more responses were read, more were added to these codes and new ones were created. The data was then broken down into groups by the label it had been allocated.

3. Generating themes – Codes created in step 2 were then streamlined into broader themes by combining related codes, whilst some codes became a theme in their own right. At this stage codes were discarded that were no longer relevant.

4. Review –Researchers ensured that themes were helpful and representative of the question as whole. The step 4 streamlining was repeated with an external researcher to IfATE.

5. Naming themes - Researchers then re-worded the themes and created a 'theme dictionary'. The theme dictionary provided a clear explanation of what came under this theme. Quality assurance from an external researcher was undertaken at this stage.

6. Analysis and write up – After the steps 1-5, all responses were categorised, by question, into themes. A response could be marked in as many themes as relevant, and some responses were not marked in any themes.

Analysts within the IfATE Research and Analysis team [created a coding frame and thematically analysed the responses](#). The coding was then quality assured by other analysts.

Following this, the report was written, highlighting the most common themes for each question. For this report, a theme was created when a broad topic or feeling is referenced more than 40 to 50 times in one question, although thresholds changed due to the number of strong themes occuring.

Analysis note

- All respondents were asked the first three questions. The other questions were asked based on the relevance to the stakeholder. Not every stakeholder or stakeholder group answered every question. Response numbers can be found, split by question, in appendix one.

- Some conversations were with multiple stakeholders at once, for example in a workshop setting. As such, the number of responses is lower than the overall number of stakeholders engaged with.

- IfATE employees held and recorded the big conversations in a cognito form. For the purposes of this report quotation marks show text copied from a cognito form, therefore it may be paraphrased and not a verbatim quotation.

- The analysis highlights the most common themes for each question. For this report, a theme was created when a broad topic or feeling is referenced more than 40 times in Q1 and Q2 and 50 times in Q3. 40 and 50 were chosen by analysts as a cut off as this marks approximately 8% as the lowest threshold of responses for each question, drawing out only the clear themes. Analysts chose a higher threshold for Q3 as more distinct themes emerged from this question.

- This is a qualitative analysis where it is best practice not to quantify responses. As such, the words 'the majority', 'many', 'some', or 'one' have been used throughout.

The analysis helps show perceptions of the people asked, which can differ across respondent.

- Differences between large employers and SMEs, and employers and non-employers are highlighted. Where there is no comment, this is due to there being no distinguishable difference in viewpoint.

- Most responses refer to apprenticeships, with some referring to T Levels.

Question one: What role do you need technical qualifications (like apprenticeships, T levels and higher technical qualifications) to play for you?

A total of 553 cognito responses were completed for this question. There were 293 responses including employer views (of which 126 were SMEs) and 260 without employer views.

A theme was created in question one when a broad topic or feeling was referenced more than 40 times. The most common themes were in the same order of priority for employers and non-employers, though there were differences in theme frequency between the two groups.

Themes in order of frequency mentioned:

A. Enabling employers to meet workforce needs through attraction of new talent and reskilling of existing staff to a recognised standard

      a. Employers discussed this more than non-employers

B. Professional development and upskilling of existing labour pool

      a. Employers discussed this more than non-employers

C. Providing employers with confidence in technical education qualifications

D. Providing high quality pathways which are not 'traditional academia'

E. Providing employees with confidence in their technical qualification

A. Enabling employers to meet workforce needs through attraction of new talent and reskilling of existing staff to recognised standard: This theme covers the need for the workforce to stay relevant and skilled to match the needs of the economy, at both local and national levels.

Many responses drew out the positive effect that technical education has and must continue to have on the labour market. Respondents stated how technical education should 'plug' skills gaps for the future workforce, meeting business, economic and government needs alike and all employer types must be involved in the conversation.

'It is vital that all employers (SME, micro etc) are able to engage in the skills debate, they are central to achieving productivity growth[…]'
-Trailblazer member & Professional, statutory or regulatory body

Some responses discussed that there is a shortage of skilled workers in certain sectors, leading to a need for competent individuals to fill these positions. Employers require confidence that they can find and hire skilled workers to meet their business needs.

Some stakeholders suggested that to meet the needs of the labour market, employers must retain and recruit staff trained to a recognised industry standard. Responses considered attracting new talent as highly important for the labour market.

'Most important role is to ensure that they [technical qualifications] attract talent into the industry including retaining those who are already there. That there is the ability to demonstrate a whole range of opportunities within the industry including clear progression routes from level 2 apprenticeships to master's degrees and senior management positions.'
-Employer, Trade Association

Some organisations went on to discuss difficulties in terms of recruitment, highlighting that there may be difficulties in recruiting the right people.

'Pipeline of talent into our business. To give us the skills we need. We are looking at massive growth over the next 5 years and will struggle to recruit correct people to fill these vacancies.'
-Employer

The idea of 'futureproofing' which involves strategies and actions taken to adapt and thrive in a changing marketplace, was important to all organisation types.

'So I'm looking to future skills needs, looking onto the horizon and so that they [learners] can add stuff to the place where they're going in the world of work. We want learners to be adaptable to change and not in a mindset that that's them forever and I really feel we need to embed that.'
-Employer

'We need these qualifications to be fit for purpose and fit for the future. This is of the utmost importance to us'
- Employer, Training provider

Some respondents also discussed their needs in more detail in areas such as digital and green skills. Responses referenced the skills required for digitalisation, such as those required for remote monitoring and autonomous vehicles. Responses highlighted the need for apprenticeships and technical qualifications to align with technological

advancements and industry demands. Other responses suggested it was important to them that technical education was sufficiently responsive to the evolving needs of specific industries.

'Apprenticeships enable us to strengthen the talent and skill base within the Hospitality and Catering sector. Our organisation is strategically aligned with Hospitality organisations of all sizes, we develop curricula which is suitable for the needs of individual employers but also provides an opportunity for learning and development to adapt based on local and national trends.'
-Training provider

'To provide routes into the sector, training, re: training and upskilling. Big skills shortage - for every ten thousand apartments to be built, 1500 bricklayers and 700 site managers are needed. Apprenticeships and TQs need to lead to competence - so that holders can work on site (safely, fluently and at pace.)'
-Trade association

One training provider felt that technical education supports local skills needs: 'The fact that the technical education system is supporting people to stay in their local communities and growing local skills bases. Individuals no longer need to leave their area to get the skills and training they need.'

B. Professional development and upskilling of existing labour pool: This theme covers responses around upskilling existing staff on an individual level, including development and progression in their given role.

Responses discussed the need for employees to have high levels of occupational competence, which are developed throughout a career. Some responses also detailed the need for technical education to be of a high standard. Responses stated upskilling existing individuals in their current roles by providing them with additional skills and knowledge to perform better was essential.

Many responses also discussed that technical education was needed to satisfy the need for staff to have opportunities to upskill and progress, specifically keeping up to date with industry developments and continuous professional development.

'Very important role for new starters, returners, re-skillers joining industry. Also upskilling in relation to new tech, trends, legislation. You are a better employer if you support growth in your employees. Apprenticeships etc. play a very significant part in that

process - has always been the case. Can do leadership as well as more technical training.'
-Training Provider

Some responses stated training and developing staff was essential as it demonstrates skills acquisition and provides assurance of competence, giving employers confidence in the abilities of their workforce. The offer of training and progression also serves as a recruitment tool to attract individuals with the required technical skills.

'I want these qualifications to be able to help young people gain the skills they require for future employment. Therefore, they need to be to a high standard and give the young person the support that they need to thrive in that environment.'
-SME

C. Provide employers with confidence in technical education qualifications: This theme covers responses around ensuring employers trust technical education qualifications and that employers know the learner will have occupational competence if they hold a specific qualification.

Occupational competence was highly important to employers, although also mentioned frequently among non-employers. 'Occupational competence' is achieved by a learner who has demonstrated having acquired all of the knowledge, skills and behaviours defined by employers as necessary for carrying out the duties of a specific occupation. Occupational competence makes the qualification appropriate for both the employer and the learner.

Responses stated employers, especially SMEs, need to have confidence that individuals possess the necessary skills and competence required for their business. It was felt technical qualifications and apprenticeships play a key role in providing this assurance, but there is a need to ensure that qualifications align with employer needs and meet quality standards. Quality standards link back to the need for employees to have occupational competence, both for their own confidence and for the employer.

'We need confidence in the qualification and that it will meet employer need, especially with regard to our Plan for Growth where we have identified areas for growth. Qualifications must support re-skilling and up-skilling, especially for people in work who might be in low paid jobs and wish to upskill.'
- Combined authority

'Develop knowledge, skills and qualifications to a person and come out the other end as a person that can do the job. I'm fairly (75%) confident that this is what we are getting'
-**Employer, Trailblazer member**

Respondents also expressed views about balancing consistency with sector-specific needs. It was noted there is a need for consistency in assessment methods and qualification standards within sectors, such as creative, hospitality, and childcare. However, responses stated how it is also important to consider the specific context and expertise of each sector to avoid developing skills that do not reflect the reality of the industry.

'It's about achieving a balance between a standardised approach and the specific context of each sector and this comes through sector experience and not just education and pedagogical theory.'
-**Stakeholder**

Responses also emphasised the need for apprenticeships and qualifications to align with technological advancements and the specific demands of industries. Employers require confidence that the skills obtained through apprenticeships and qualifications are relevant and up-to-date.

Some responses delved further into the specifics of respective industries. This suggests that employers seek confidence in understanding how skills and qualifications directly apply to their industry's requirements.

D. Providing high quality alternative pathways which are not 'traditional academia': This theme covers responses that discussed showing apprenticeships as 'equal' to a university degree, both for academic and non-academic subjects.

Many responses stated the need for technical education pathways to be presented as equally attractive as academic educational pathways like A Levels and degrees without expanding on this point, whilst other responses were more detailed.

Some respondents referred to the perceived existence of a prejudice in favour of 'academic' over 'technical' education and training. However, while this view was frequently ascribed to other commentators, it was not cited as the position of the respondents themselves. For example, numerous respondents claimed that 'other people' placed more value on university education than on technical education and training - but no respondents endorsed this perceived attitude. In fact, in some instances

stakeholders explained that they valued apprenticeships over a university education, even where they did not believe this was a majority view.

'The perception of university degrees and of degree level apprenticeships are not perceived the same. There is a perception that people with a degree are the brighter of the two, but because I've worked with both the apprenticeship programme and the graduate programme, I can see the difference that the years of experience that the apprentices have is far better that those who are just about to start a career straight out of university.'
-SME

Some responses discussed the benefits of apprenticeships as an alternative and attractive pathway to academia.

'Apprenticeships provide a direct pathway to gaining practical skills and industry-specific knowledge, ensuring a smooth transition into the workforce.'
-Stakeholder

'Apprenticeships bridge the gap between education and employment, equipping individuals with the practical skills needed to thrive in their chosen industries.'
-Stakeholder

It was felt that apprenticeships aid social mobility by providing opportunities for individuals who may have been overlooked in traditional education systems. Similarly, some responses noted that apprenticeships enable individuals to earn while they learn, extending access to training and further education to those for whom cost may have been a barrier. A few responses noted the rising cost of living and that the cost of higher education may be leading more people to look for alternatives, such as technical education and apprenticeships, recognising them as worthwhile and viable alternatives to university.

'Apprenticeships allow individuals to earn and learn, providing a supported way of working where learners can apply their knowledge to real-life scenarios. The apprenticeship system works well in supporting those who may not be able to take an alternative route.'
-Stakeholder

Many responses believed that there was more that could be done around the awareness, perception and promotion of technical education that would lead to both routes being viewed as equally attractive. Stakeholders felt a limited awareness of technical qualifications compared to the academic route justifies increased promotion of technical qualifications to improve understanding. Stakeholders noted this could be improved with better careers information, the same coverage and support as the university route, and better employer engagement. They noted that developing high-prestige products with strong employer recognition and improving career entry pathways is essential.

'Clear structure for progression, that all people within education understand including primary and secondary schools. Careers guidance needs to understand the structure and the role of technical qualifications rather than just A levels.'
 – Employer, training provider

Some responses mentioned degree apprenticeships as beneficial for encouraging technical education pathways. One response noted another benefit of degree apprenticeships is that they allow for recruitment from local communities, preventing retention issues caused by long-distance relocation.

Suggestions included views that apprenticeships, particularly at Level 3 and above, should be aligned with professional registration. It was noted technical engineering apprenticeships would benefit from further alignment with recognised engineering standards to enhance their value.

Where T Levels were mentioned, they were recognised as a newer type of technical qualification. Overall T Levels were considered helpful, though it was felt they need time to establish themselves.

E. Provide employees with confidence in their technical qualification: providing employees with confidence needed to fulfil their job role to industry standard.

This was similar to 'providing employers with confidence', however this theme places the focus on the employee. Employees and their employers alike want to know that a qualification will lead to occupational competence: 'Employers and learners do need the confidence to complete a competence-based qualification.'
-**No stakeholder type given**

The core points within this theme reflect the importance of providing employees with confidence in the qualifications and apprenticeships they pursue, ensuring relevance, quality, equal access, career progression, and practical applicability.

Responses noted that employees who have completed apprenticeships feel confident in their roles because they have gained actual work experience, which they believe is greater than what they would have gained from a degree. Apprenticeships help develop confidence in workplace etiquette.

'Personally, as an apprentice, it is about the competency. I am learning the things I need to do the job, my Level 6 is giving me the skills and confidence I need to put forward new ideas.'
-**Apprentice**

Employees want to be confident that the qualifications they obtain will be valued and respected by employers. Respondents tended to use confidence and competence inter-

changeably to convey the idea that they would be fully equipped to do their chosen role. Employers said they need people that can do the job well and desired consistency and credibility in the qualifications, ensuring that they cover the required knowledge and skills. Learners sought confidence that the qualifications are recognised and respected by employers.

'Credibility is not just about having a qualification, but about having the knowledge, skills, and experience that are valued and respected by employers. It's about being able to demonstrate your competence and expertise in your chosen field.'
-**Stakeholder**

'Apprenticeships provide a full training platform that means, when you complete the programme, you are a competent person ready to be employed. But that means that the programme needs to well quality assured, assessed and hit the standard in terms of what is needed. No exceptions and no variation!'
-**Employer**

Some respondents discussed building workplace resilience and soft skills. Employees and employers alike emphasise the importance of building workplace resilience and developing soft skills. Stakeholders believe that these skills are essential for success in the workplace and should be incorporated into training programs.

'Hard skills may get you an interview, but soft skills will get you the job and help you thrive in your career. In today's competitive world, the ability to communicate, collaborate, adapt, and lead with empathy and emotional intelligence is essential for success.'
-**Stakeholder**

Some respondents noted a need for the continuation of equal opportunities for disabled and non-disabled individuals. Qualifications should continue to be flexible and accessible, without barriers, to accommodate different groups facing disadvantage. Further improvements to further encourage applicants from these groups should continue to be made.

One response noted a lack of opportunities for technical learning before the age of 16 and saw this as a structural problem. The respondent felt that allowing young people to try technical learning earlier can contribute to a more balanced education system and better decision-making regarding academic and technical pathways. Another respondent noted how important this pre-16 technical learning can be.

"Pre-16 technical learning is a powerful investment in the future workforce. By introducing young minds to technical skills and knowledge at an early age, we unlock their potential to become innovative problem solvers and prepare them for the ever-evolving demands of the digital age."
-**Stakeholder**

Question two: What do you think is already working in the skills system that we should keep?

A total of 536 cognito form responses were submitted to the above question, with 276 responses including employer views (119 from SMEs).

Differences between large employers and SMEs and employers and non-employers are highlighted. Where there is no comment, this is due to there being no distinguishable difference in viewpoint.

A theme is created when a broad topic or feeling is referenced more than 40 times in one question. The most common themes were the same order of priority for employers and non-employers, though there were differences in theme frequency between the two groups.

Themes in order of frequency mentioned:

A. Employer role in developing and maintaining technical education is highly important

B. Structure and support of the skills system helps users navigate the technical education landscape

C. Use of the levy

D. The End Point Assessment (EPA) works well

E. The variety of technical education is positive as it provides options

There were 104 general comments about technical education working well, and 49 more negative comments where respondents spoke about things that were working less well.

Stakeholders noted all aspects of the skills system below to be working well, however they felt there was still more work that could be done, and this is reflected in the responses to question 3.

'I have 'partial confidence' that the skills system is working - this is working far better than it has done in the past but always room for improvement'
-Employer

A. Employer role in developing and maintaining technical education is highly important: This theme covers responses that value the skills system being employer led.

It was noted across all stakeholder groups that employers play a crucial role in the success of apprenticeships and technical education. Employers are seen as leading the pro-

cess and providing valuable input to ensure training and qualifications are tailored to industry needs.

Responses highlighted the importance of employer engagement, co-design, flexibility, clarity, recognition of qualifications in the skills system by employers, and the success of apprenticeships. Responses highlighted that it is crucial to involve employers of all sizes, simplify processes, and provide a range of apprenticeship options to meet the diverse needs of all industries and all learners.

Responses suggested collaboration and co-design between employers, providers, and awarding organisations is crucial for the success of apprenticeships. Employer input ensures that apprenticeships meet industry standards and provide practical skills valued by employers. Responses stressed that employers' leadership of qualifications and apprenticeships development works well, and that this must be retained and increased for maximum effectiveness.

'What's working: employer leadership, but need to listen to employers even more[…]'
-Employer

'The employer voice is working in the development of apprenticeships. The model supports the development of a qualification which fulfils employer requirements for apprenticeship standards.'
-Employer, IfATE trailblazer group member

'The employer led occupational standards are helping to align the learning and development of individuals with roles in the work place now and in the future and helping to move away from the traditionally taught single science topic academic paths e.g. biology, physics and chemistry into a much more blended pathway allowing the learning to better reflect the skills needed in the workplace and prepare the country for the skills of the future around areas such as machine learning, gamma science and robotics in science. Where individuals can learn multidisciplinary knowledge and skills placing the UK at the forefront of science in the future.'
-Stakeholder

Some responses discussed how employers are encouraged to invest in apprenticeships, and how the introduction of the apprenticeship levy has made it clearer for employers to understand what they are paying for. Clarity regarding funding and cost allocation was cited as an important factor in ensuring employers know how to use the levy.

Some responses went on to state that there is still a further need for simplification in the apprenticeship system to make it easier for employers to understand and navigate. Clear pathways into and out of qualifications, along with a transparent understanding of what employers are paying for is essential.

Some responses also spoke about the involvement of SMEs, noting the need for increased involvement of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in decision-making processes. Respondents noted that SMEs have different needs from large employers, and their perspectives should be considered to avoid a "one size fits all" approach.

'SME and micro employers need to be considered more in the decision making. The system is dominated by the large employers. SME and micro employers have different needs to large employers'
-**Stakeholder**

However, some respondents recognised that it can be challenging to get smaller employers involved due to time constraints. Many stakeholders nevertheless felt efforts should be made to encourage participation from a wider range of employers, including smaller ones.

Some respondents felt that to continue to encourage employer engagement the way the skills system is explained and marketed to employers needs improvement. The language used should be easily understood, and the process should be accessible and in plain English.

B. Structure and support of the skills system helps users navigate the technical education landscape: This theme covers the mechanics of the skills system, and comments about the efficacy of existing information and guidance (IAG).

This theme covers the mechanics of the skills system, for example the partnerships between employers and IfATE, and how the stages of an apprenticeship work well together. There were mixed and nuanced responses surrounding this topic with further opportunities for improvement on current arrangements captured in question three.

There was positive feedback on structure of the skills system and the provision of information and guidance in apprenticeships. Responses noted the clear pathway for career progression allowing apprentices to advance from entry-level positions to higher levels, fostering job satisfaction and hopefully retention. Standardisation of knowledge, skills, and behaviours (KSBs) facilitating skill transferability and options for different career pathways was mentioned as a positive.

Responses also discussed that existing information and guidance (IAG) is working well, though some respondents wanted there to be better signposting to the IAG across the whole skills landscape, as well as expressing a desire for improved quantity and clarity of IAG.

'Digital account does work for employers and is useful as a one-stop-shop and Gov.UK [website] advice is useful and clear.'
-**Local Enterprise Partnership**

Many of the responses focused on the structure of apprenticeships: 'The apprenticeship brand has really improved with focus on knowledge as well as on skills'. Responses noted apprenticeships offer a defined pathway for progression within various industries, allowing individuals to advance from entry-level positions to higher levels. This structured

approach, such as the progression from level two to level three, and then to level five or six, provides apprentices with a clear and beneficial career development path.

There were also positive responses around the support mechanism and training of apprenticeships. Responses stated that because apprentices can seek guidance and training this ensures that apprentices receive necessary assistance, are not overwhelmed by the work environment, and have opportunities to learn and grow.

'The whole set up works well, having someone in the business who goes to an education establishment for a day or so a week works.'
-Employer

'Apprenticeship standards are broadly working well. IFATE process has sped up and feels more transparent.'
-SME

One response from an employer commented on the website: 'the IFATE website is helpful for finding information and what you can get involved in'.

Another response commented on the structure of occupational maps.

'The structure of the occupational map is working and all of the products align. There is a clear escalation and progress.'
-Professional, statutory or regulatory body

C. Use of the levy: this theme covers stakeholder views on the levy

Respondents commented on the Apprenticeship Levy as an aspect of the skills system that was working well. For example, some felt that the levy was successful in ensuring funds are used effectively for training and professional development purposes, and that its flexibility and availability helps make apprenticeships widely accessible. Respondents noted the importance of ensuring sufficient coverage of training provision across all sectors in support of the utility of the levy. Some responses also included commentary on where respondents felt there was scope for further extension or development of the levy.

D. End point assessments (EPAs) work well: This theme covers positive attitudes to the EPA.

End Point Assessments (EPAs) are a defining feature of the apprenticeship system, ensuring that apprentice learning is holistically assessed and that apprentices are able to demonstrate their technical competence within their chosen occupation.

Responses were generally positive regarding the effectiveness of EPAs. Various stakeholders, including employers, apprentices, training providers, and industry representa-

tives, highlighted the perceived benefits of EPA, such as promoting robust assessment practices, recognising professional achievement, and fostering the development of transferable skills.

Some responses suggested the introduction of EPAs have given more structure to apprenticeships, addressing concerns regarding the relevance and adequacy of the training and assessment received by apprentices in the past. It was noted that end point assessments provide a clear and transparent evaluation of an apprentice's capabilities, leaving no room for doubt about the competence of apprenticeship certificate-holders.

'End Point Assessments are improving standards in the sector. A mind set has changed towards the EPA over recent times and employers are now understanding the value of the EPA. However, there is a need to ensure that the EPA is been applied in a consistent approach by EPAO's. Using the given tools from the assessment plan to give a robust assessment outcome.'
-Stakeholder

Some responses noted that incorporating EPAs incentivises employers to provide apprentices with relevant workplace experience, as successful completion of the assessment reflects positively on both the apprentice and the employer. This structured approach aims to bridge any gaps between theoretical learning and practical application, thereby enhancing the overall quality of apprenticeship programs meaning the apprentice is ready for full-time employment.

'It is good to have an end point assessment at the end of an apprenticeship, it ensures that the apprentice will receive the training throughout their programme so they can pass this. Anecdotally we have heard of apprentices who did not receive relevant work experience for some period of their apprenticeship and knowing that there will be an assessment at the end encourages the employer to offer this.'
-SME

Additionally, responses noted EPAs have been seen to enhance the credibility and recognition of apprenticeships within industries. The establishment of standardised assessment processes helps to ensure consistency in evaluating apprentices' competence across different training providers and employers. It was felt that this standardisation contributes to building trust among employers, reinforcing that apprenticeships give individuals the necessary skills and knowledge required for the job.

One response noted that the professional recognition gained through successful EPAs can benefit apprentices in their future career progression, as employers value the assurance of an independent assessment validating their competence.

'EPA was a good way of confirming my competence and that someone who didn't know me saw what I was capable of in my role.'
-Former apprentice

E. The variety of technical education is positive as it provides options: This theme covers broad comments on stakeholders' views of the variety of the skills system, especially apprenticeships

Responses show that overall stakeholders generally appreciate the variety of technical qualifications and apprenticeships available, recognising the benefits of choice, adaptability, and alignment with industry needs.

Respondents mostly saw the variety of technical qualifications and apprenticeships available as a positive aspect. Stakeholders appreciated the flexibility and adaptability of the education system, which allows for tailoring programs to meet the needs of individuals with varying skill sets and interests.

'The diversity of options available is working well. This diversity ensures education can be tailored to meet the needs of all sorts of people.'
-University

'The variety of apprenticeships is really good […] it might be worth looking at things about emerging skills and other things like electric vehicles. The design of apprenticeships is generally good but having a variety of learning styles, having employer input is really valuable, also having training providers.'
-**Employer**

Stakeholders also recognised the breadth of qualifications in different sector areas and emphasised the importance of this variety. Responses noted that a wide range of apprenticeships and technical courses provide individuals with greater choice and allows them to select programs that align with their career goals. The continuous growth of apprenticeships is seen as a positive development, as it enables the exploration of new fields and the acquisition of specialised skills. Some stakeholders also referenced social mobility as a benefit of the system.

'It's great that there are so many options, wide breadth of different apprenticeships. Also good that apprenticeships can appeal to those that the university route doesn't work for.'
-SME

'People love that we are now able to build a career path from L2-7 with apprentices.'
-SME

While stakeholders generally acknowledged the importance of variety, some respondents find the abundance of information and options overwhelming and challenging to navigate. They expressed a need for consistency across different regions and a clearer understanding of the available choices.

'There are lots and lots of qualifications, but it is bewildering and tricky to understand. There is a need for consistency across devolved nations.'
-SME

Question three: What do you think needs to change in the skills system to help employers recruit staff with the right skills?

A total of 548 responses were submitted to the above question, with 298 including employer views (129 SMEs).

Differences between large employer's and SMEs, and employers and non-employers are highlighted. Where there is no comment, this is due to there being no distinguishable difference in viewpoint.

Themes in order of frequency mentioned:

A. The need for technical education to be viewed as equally attractive as 'traditional academia'

B. Use of the apprenticeship levy

C. Larger employers raised the apprenticeship levy more than SMEs

D. Greater simplification of the infrastructure of the skills system

    a. Larger employers raised this point more than SMEs

E. More support is needed for employers when navigating the skills system

    a. Employers raised employer support more than non-employers

F. More flexibility within the skills system is needed (progression and transferability)

G. More support for SMEs in the skills system

A small number of other themes were also mentioned relatively frequently, but less than 50 times:

- Requirements around Maths and English
- The need for greater Equity, diversity and inclusion
- The need for greater consistency in the quality of system

A. The need for technical education to be viewed as equally attractive as 'traditional academia': importance of learners being able to make informed decisions about their futures.

Responses discussed the need for educating and making learners aware of their career options. Some respondents felt that career guidance is too university focused, stating schools needed to do more to promote technical education as a viable 'first' option. A suggestion to explain this bias was that teachers themselves do not possess the technical education knowledge, having most likely pursued the university route. In addition, parents and guardians may not have technical education knowledge either.

'The academic route is clear and understood. We need to do more on occupational pathways. Some of the routes are quite narrow. We could do more with younger age groups as a pathway into TE 14-16 for example. Schools acknowledge TE but it's not high up their priorities, they promote work or A levels and degrees more actively because Teachers are better informed.'
– SME

Responses highlighted a strong need for a more joined up approach, with learners needing to be signposted to simple and clear information and guidance.

'There needs to be more a joined-up approach to recruitment; government, schools, colleges, providers etc. need to work together more to inform and educate potential candidates about apprenticeships'
– Trade association

'Parity of esteem is still a huge area that needs work. It would be great to see IfATE taking a more proactive role in getting the message out there to young people…getting information to learners at a younger age of the different choices available is key.'
- SME

Responses discussed perceptions around technical education, with some responses speaking about a stigma attached to technical education as not being as valuable. Some responds felt that further education colleges may be better at promoting technical education routes than schools.

Some respondents noted a change in the way technical education is viewed, although acknowledging that more change is needed.

'Why is the academic route hailed as triumphant in a world crying out for skills? I believe the change has started – IfATE has helped – but there is a lot more work to do. Apprenticeships and technical education should not be the 'poor relation' and things haven't yet changed enough.'
– Training provider

Some respondents suggested the idea of case studies and showcasing where an apprenticeship can lead, as well as the suggestion of better communication of occupational pathways.

'We are seeing the momentum within the company for hiring apprentices increase and the message is moving from the more traditionally held view of what an apprenticeship is. More case studies in the press of success would be helpful.'
- **Employer**

'On Occupational Maps, for wider use it may be better to have links to real life stories and progression routes in particular on the diversity of apprentices. Would be really good to push some of the opportunities that higher level.'
 - **Employer**

One suggestion was around the culture of apprenticeships.

'At schools, everyone goes to universities still. When asked on why, the main reason is around the 'university life'. We need to look at how to sell the 'apprenticeship life'. Could we set up halls of residences for apprentices, have apprenticeship unions, try and look again at the culture of an apprenticeship.'
- **SME**

B. Use of the apprenticeship levy

Although some respondents had commented on how the Apprenticeship Levy was successful in their answers to question 2, opportunities for the levy to be extended or amended were also identified in responses to question 3. Some of these responses were predicated on a perception that a proportion of levy funds were unspent, and a range of different purposes for the expenditure of unspent levy were proposed, including greater flexibility for using the levy for different qualifications. Some respondents sought clearer information about levy funds and expenditure

C. Simplification of the infrastructure of the skills system: This theme covers the need for a transparent and cohesive system based on 'joined up' thinking, with processes simplified and streamlined.

This theme relates to the need for simpler ways of navigating the system and cohesion between the organisations involved. Administrative burden and accountability were mentioned frequently, often raising issues with excessive paperwork, multiple monitoring organisations, the role of education and training providers (TPs), and the need for better accountability of EPAOs (End Point Assessment Organisations).

'Need organisations in sector to come together and agree common ground so skills are portable and give better guidance for qualifications.'
- **Professional, statutory or regulatory body**

Respondents commented on the need to ensure clarity for users of the system, whether in accessing funding or in the arrangements surrounding the way to recruit apprenticeships.

'Quite a complex system, it needs to be streamlined, distinct and bespoke advice for SMEs and levy payers. Some organisations have an apprenticeships team to organise things, and others do not. There are different levels of understanding and so many organisations for them to try to understand (IfATE, DfE, Office for students etc) can be difficult for them to navigate.'
- **Training provider**

Respondents also expressed frustration with the time it takes for standards to be reviewed and revised. They expected changes to be implemented quickly once announced, and delays led to difficulties in planning and preparation.

Some respondents felt that there were conflicting priorities, which caused confusion. It was also noted that multiple government accounts are needed to undertake or support an apprenticeship, and that system-generated emails were not always clear or helpful.

'Simplification of the system as there are conflicting priorities and confusion. For example, keep getting requests from AOs to support HTQs.'
- **Professional, statutory or regulatory body**

Although there was support for external quality assurance:
'Good move to reduce the external quality assurance responsibility to Ofqual and OfS. It provides apprentices with assurance on regulatory cover for learners to follow different routes.'
-**Stakeholder**

One employer commented that employers and learners do not know to look for IfATE as a source of vital information. Some respondents commented on the need for simplification of language used, for example removing 'jargon' and acronyms. Respondents felt the system should be simplified to reduce complexity and ensure better awareness among employers, learners, and parents. This should include providing more information on T-Levels and career opportunities, as well as improving careers education from a young age.

'Use clearer language across the board. In particular on how standards are described.'
– Training provider

'As a trailblazer chair - I had no idea where to go to get information and people were speaking acronyms at me that I did not know. The process felt 'mystical'. After doing my own research on the website, I found lots of information, but this was not initially made aware to me. There was no signposting which was the issue.'
– Trailblazer

Respondents felt the system needed to be simpler at the point of access, to support a learner to find a qualification, and then find out how to participate in training. Suggestions included a one-stop portal and simplifying the system for learners, parents and guardians and employers.

D. More support for employers when navigating the skills system: This theme covers suggestions for more employer support when navigating the skills system.

Most responses centred around 2 core themes:

- **Employer awareness and understanding of apprenticeships:** Responses suggested more work is needed to ensure that employers fully understand apprenticeships, their components, and their expectations.

- **Support for employers in navigating the skills system:** Responses stated employers require guidance and support to navigate the complex skills system and identify the available support and resources. By providing clearer information and guidance, employers can make more informed decisions about the skills and qualifications they require.

'There needs to be more support for employers so they can see easily what provision is available, at the moment this is confusing. They don't always know where to go to recruit and they haven't got time to research.'
-Membership organisation

Stakeholders also emphasised the importance of fostering collaboration between training providers and employers. This collaboration can facilitate the development of relevant curriculum and work-based learning opportunities.

Some stakeholders said that part of the support for employers lies in raising awareness among employers and young people about technical education choices.

Some stakeholders stressed the significance of providing clear information to employers about the benefits of hiring T Level students, including return-on-investment evidence. This can encourage their participation in T Levels and create more employment opportunities.

E. More flexibility within the skills system is needed (progression and transferability): This theme covers suggestions surrounding more flex-ibility in the skills system, around the requirements, progression and transferability

Respondents discussed the flexibility of technical education, noting that some learners feel that they are not getting a career from their apprenticeship after completion of the EPA.

Responses stated that apprenticeships should provide opportunities for progression beyond gaining qualifications and it was noted there may be limited options for progression and career pathways in certain industries and sectors. However, a reported lack of visibility of progression pathways and limited information about available apprenticeships and technical qualifications may explain this perception.

It was noted that there is a difficulty in transferring apprenticeships across jobs and geographical locations, leading to loss of learning and inability to complete the apprenticeship in some cases. Some respondents also felt that a lack of co-ordination and consistency in approaches between devolved nations is hindering movement and employment across regions.

‘The devolved nations - they feel very separate and more needs to be done to take a more coordinated approach so that people can move between nations for work and some employers operate across the nations’
-Stakeholder

Many respondents commented on the difficulty in transferring between providers and employers whilst undertaking technical education.

‘Flexibility is important, change will happen, people will get more fulfilling careers and be happier in their job role – we all want to be happy at work.’
-SME

F. More support for SMEs in the skills system

The majority of responses in this theme felt the current systems and standards in place for apprenticeships are often geared toward larger organisations, leaving smaller businesses at a disadvantage. This can impact standards, funding, flexibility, and support for SMEs.

Respondents felt that there was a lack of SME representation and some SMEs felt that their voices were not being heard in the apprenticeship system as the decision-making processes are dominated by larger employers. Many stakeholders noted that there is a need for more involvement and influence of SMEs in the design of qualifications and standards.

'I am still hearing from employers who say the same thing - the SMEs voice is getting lost. It is only the big players who get to influence the system. More effort must be made to hear the SME voice.'
-Stakeholder

Respondents expressed the need for better support and guidance for SMEs in understanding apprenticeship funding, standards, and the overall system.

'The difficulty for SMEs is that they do not have big HR functions to dedicate people and time to learn new policy and new changes in rules, funding etc. Give employers a chance to understand it so that they can work within it, rather than having to constantly review and change.'
-Stakeholder

It was discussed that SMEs often struggle to participate in the development of apprenticeship standards due to time and resource constraints. One response noted how finding alternative ways to involve SMEs in the design process, such as online consultations, would ensure their voices are heard. Similarly, responses suggested that simplifying funding and reducing bureaucracy would make it easier for SMEs to navigate the system.

'SMEs need to be involved in the design of technical education products, to help make sure they are appropriate and viable for them. This needs to be done in a less onerous way for them – e.g., via online consultation – as it isn't usually possible for them to make the time to sit on Trailblazer groups. SME voices need to hold the same weight and power as those of large employers, even if they don't sit on Trailblazer groups.'
-Stakeholder

Responses stated that improved marketing and clearer information about available support would also help SMEs engage in apprenticeships and technical education.

One respondent discussed regional engagement and co-ordination, stating that SMEs require regional opportunities to provide input and feedback, as they often lack the resources and time to engage in lengthy development processes. Establishing panels of SMEs and strengthening collaboration between local skills hubs and central organisations could help address this issue.

Some responses indicated that more incentives and support are needed to encourage SMEs to take on apprenticeships, including financial assistance and partnerships with other businesses.

'The hard sell for smaller employers is that they still struggle with paying and employing the apprentice.'
-Stakeholder

Other themes

- Equity, diversity and inclusion: This theme covers EDI and social mobility, with comments about topics such as women in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) and regional barriers.

- Greater consistency in the quality of system: This theme discussed the need for greater consistency within the system, for example the differing standards of training providers and EPAOs.

'We think the lack of clarity and transparency around the aims and success measures of the apprenticeship system undermines the good work'.
-Employer

More informed stakeholders - wider issues on which IfATE will work with others

More informed stakeholders were asked questions four and five. As the number of responses was so much smaller, the themes referenced below are general key points unlike the themes for questions one, two and three.

More informed stakeholders are typically stakeholders with extensive experience of using the skills system, for example they have used technical education qualifications for a long time or are supporting the development of these.

Question four: The workforce is changing. Do you think the skills system needs to change anything to help employers respond to future national challenges? E.g. EDI, green skills, emerging skills.

- **Incorporating green skills:** Responses addressed the need for the skills system to provide green skills to meet the demands of sustainable development. It emphasises the need for clarity, information, and training opportunities in this area. Points also covered the importance of sustainability and green technologies, and it was suggested that sustainability should be integrated as a core skill alongside digital skills, and all apprentices should be given projects related to sustainable working practices.

- **Addressing diversity and equity:** It was noted that the skills system should promote diversity and inclusion, addressing barriers to social mobility and ensuring equal access to training. A handful of responses noted the need to reduce gender bias in recruitment.

- **Importance of investing in skills at pace:** Respondents recognised the value of investing in skills and the need for adequate funding from employers and government. It was also felt that there should be flexibility to introduce additional content and remove outdated content without a lengthy and drawn-out process.

- **Recognition of emerging mental health needs:** Some respondents commented on the importance of considering mental health support within education, including apprenticeships.

- **Need for a modular system**: Some respondents felt there was a need for a modular approach to training and education, ensuring alignment with employer need and facilitating innovation.

- **Collaboration between employers and training providers:** Responses addressed the importance of fostering closer collaboration between employers and training providers.

- **Beyond traditional training sectors:** Responses emphasised the need for the skills system to reach further beyond sectors like manufacturing, which have a longer tradition of participation in training and skills, ensuring all sectors recognise the opportunities and use them to the maximum.

- **Limitations, risks and benefits in the hybrid world of work**: Some responses addressed the changes that hybrid work arrangements would bring to the future of training and development and the need for employers and providers to make the most of the opportunities it offers for remote and flexible learning.

Question five: Imagine you have skills needs as an employer or training needs as an individual. What do you do to address these at the moment, and what would help you address them better in the future?

- **Skills gap and training needs:** Respondents noted a perceived gap between the skills demanded by industries and the skills possessed by the workforce. They highlighted the importance of identifying training needs and developing relevant skills to bridge this gap. Responses suggest the focus needs to be on equipping individuals with the necessary competencies and ensuring their alignment with industry requirements.

- **Future planning and transitional support:** These responses emphasised the significance of assessing the current state of the labour market and envisioning the desired future state. Responses describe the need for transitional measures to facilitate the smooth transition between these two points. This includes comprehensive planning, resource allocation, and support, especially for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), to successfully navigate and adapt to changing circumstances.

- **Support for SMEs:** Some responses commented on the importance of ensuring small employers, including micro-enterprises, actively engage in apprenticeships and provide training opportunities.

- **Career guidance and pathways:** Responses emphasised the need for accessible and comprehensive career guidance, particularly for young people. Responses advocate for clear information and resources that help individuals navigate between different educational pathways, such as university, apprenticeships, and technical education. Responses highlight the aim should be to empower individuals to make informed decisions about their career trajectories.

- **Regionalisation and decision-making power:** Some responses highlighted the recent devolution changes with regard to technical education. They highlight the value of bringing regional authorities together with local employers to tailor training programs according to local needs. The emphasis is on promoting long-term commitment, fostering local partnerships, and ensuring the relevance of training initiatives to regional industries.

- **Professional qualifications and standards:** Respondents noted the significance of professional qualifications and the ongoing improvement of standards. Responses call for proactive measures to anticipate emerging skills and adapt training programs accordingly. Additionally, responses explore the role of more

universities in delivering apprenticeships and supporting the expansion of standardised training frameworks.

- **Engagement of employers and industry:** Responses noted the vital role of employer engagement in shaping training programs and ensuring their alignment with industry needs. Responses acknowledge the challenges faced in attracting employers and finding qualified assessors. Responses also highlight the importance of fostering collaboration between small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) to promote shared learning and industry participation.

- **Information and guidance:** Responses discussed the need for improved communication and clear signposting of available training options and resources. It advocates for user-friendly platforms and comprehensive information sources that connect individuals, businesses, and training providers. Stakeholders would like to see streamlined access to relevant training opportunities and facilitate informed decision-making.

- **Internal development and teacher education:** Responses stressed the significance of internal development within organisations and the continuous upskilling and reskilling of employees. It recognises the importance of investing in the professional growth of the workforce. Additionally, it highlights the need to enhance teacher education, ensuring educators have industry experience and insights to provide effective career advice and foster awareness of industry demands among students.

Question six: Is there anything else you would like to mention?

Stakeholders were also asked if there was anything else that they would like to bring up after the conversation. Many of the points had already been noted in the above questions, as such the list below provides a succinct overview of the key points that were not mentioned within the questions above.

Please note some of the topics below are wider issues that IfATE are not directly able to influence. IfATE will work with others, like Department for Education, where required.

- **Economic pressures:** Some respondents shared views on their concerns about wage levels and the investment required to support apprentices within businesses

- **Employer responsibility:** Discussing the role of employers creating a supportive working environments for apprentices.

- **Benefits of apprenticeships:** Recognising the value of apprenticeships in providing paid job opportunities and practical experience without incurring student loan debt.

- **Recognition and qualifications:** Discussing the need for industry recognition of apprenticeships as valuable qualifications, comparable to professional qualifications awarded by external bodies.

- **Lifelong learning:** Recognising apprenticeships as a means for ongoing learning and professional development throughout one's career.

T Levels

Although most feedback related to apprenticeships, T levels received some specific feedback.

T Levels are a new qualification for students aged 16 to 19 in England who have finished GCSEs.

They are an alternative to A levels and apprenticeships, giving young people the technical and practical skills needed to be an asset in the workplace. T Levels combine classroom learning with a substantial industry placement.

Views on T Levels:

- Value of T Levels: Employers recognised T levels as a good solution and appreciate their value, with feedback saying that T Level learners are successful and highly regarded in the workplace.

- T Levels are seen as a positive addition to the educational system, especially due to their links to industry standards.

- T Levels have the potential to provide practical experience and technical skills, which are valuable for university applications and employment.

- T Levels offer practical experience in fields such as science, providing students with the necessary skills and knowledge to excel in practical assessments and real-world laboratory settings.

- T Levels contribute to widening participation, allowing individuals from different backgrounds to access technical training and education

- T Levels are recognised as a valuable route and work needs to continue to raise awareness among students about available routes and the qualification approval process.

- T Levels have an important place in the system, such as aerospace, where they offer a route into higher education.

- Understanding and collaboration between colleges, employers, and universities will create a sustainable ecosystem for T Levels.

- Sharing best practice and case studies can help employers understand how to effectively implement T Levels and achieve scalability.

IfATE thanks everyone who was involved in the big conversation 2022-23.

To keep in touch and hear about future insight gathering and research opportunities please follow IfATE on LinkedIn.

Appendix one: response numbers by question

Conversations could include multiple stakeholders, meaning responses could be classified as including SMEs and large employers. When splitting by employer or non-employer, all conversations including at least one employer were classed as 'employer' and conversations without any employers were classed as 'non-employer'.

Question	Total responses	Including an employer	Including an SME (under 250 employees)	Including a large employer (250+ employees)
One	553	293	126	185
Two	536	276	119	174
Three	548	298	129	187
Four	281	142	70	85
Five	200	109	48	71
Six	306	163	68	104