



Navigating change

The future of the post-16 skills landscape

Speakers and *workshop leads*



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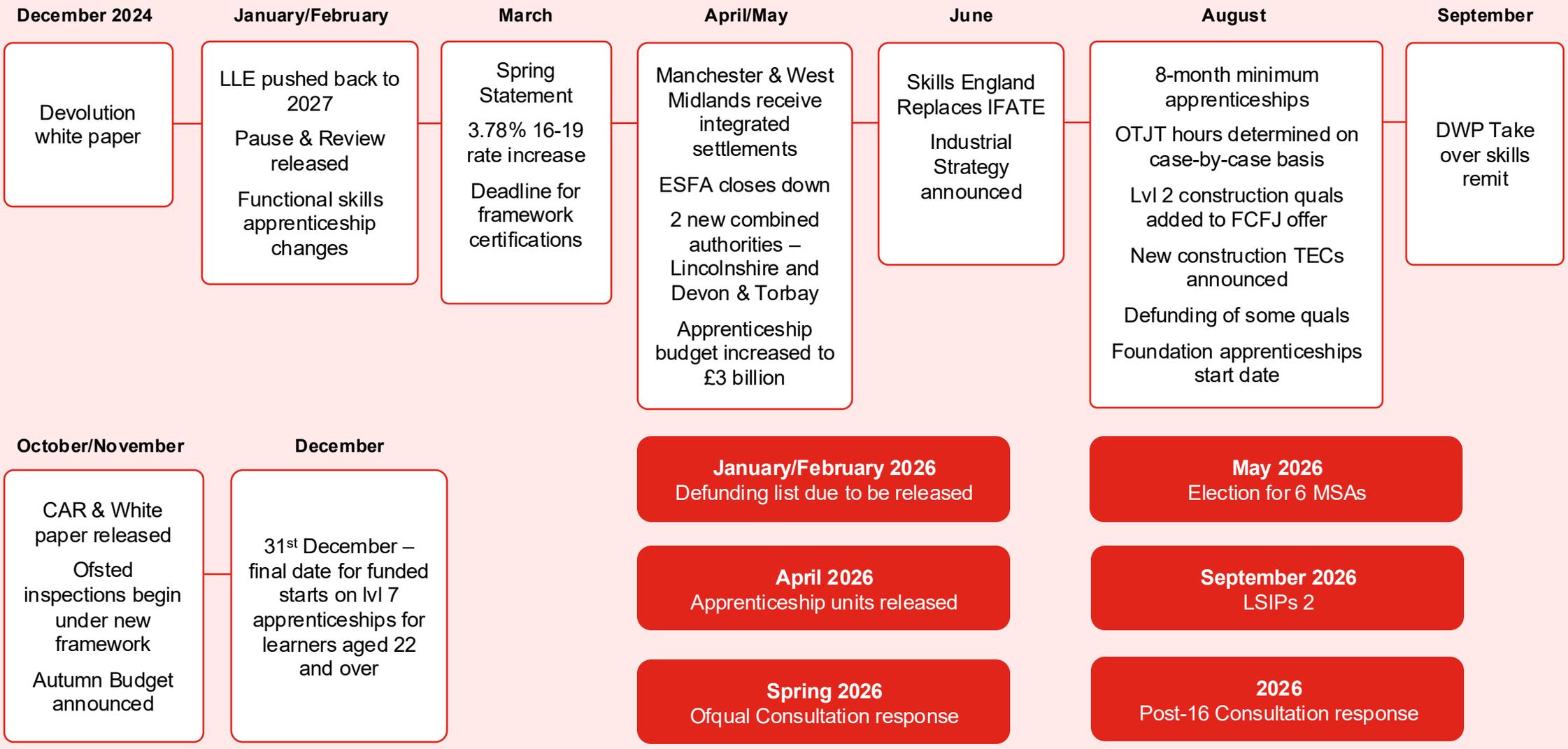
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Policy – Before, Now & Coming Up

Post-16 Policy *Wrapped 2025*





Post 16 *White Paper*

A comprehensive report that outlines the strategic plan the government intends to implement to improve Post 16 skills to meet the needs of the changing world we are living in.

There are 4 sections –

- Working with Employers to Drive Growth
- A specialist and prestigious further education system
- Strengthening our world-leading higher education system
- How we will measure success

The paper can be found here =

[Post-16 education and skills white paper - GOV.UK](#)

More investment and engagement from employers and Government



A revised qualification offer at levels 1,2 & 3. Flex added to levy & Levels 4 and 5



Focus on NEETS and linking of adult skills and employment pathways

White Paper *Overview*

The WP starts to outline the future of FE, with the introduction of increased investment to tackle the problem of the ‘missing middle’ in our workforce.

To be achieved *by creating a specialist and prestigious further education sector* so that everyone can access opportunities through high-quality training.

There is a lot of commitment on the government’s part to do more to achieve this.

The paper also covers how the government intend to encourage more employer engagement and investment in skills, *emphasizing the need for employers to invest if they want a talented workforce pipeline for the future*, with a plan for public/private partnerships as part of that investment.





White Paper *Overview*

The major developments from the white paper include:

- Investment in and reform of FE teacher Training and Recruitment
- More investment in the FE capital estate
- A third pathway at level 3 (V Levels)
- An enhanced Level 2 offer with two clear post-16 pathways (occupational and further study pathway).
- Plans for addressing the NEET issue, including enhanced support (Youth Guarantee) and an improved Level 1 offer.
- Introduction of more modular short course learning via the growth and skills levy and the level 4 and 5 offer via the LLE.
- Reforms to funding, incentives and regulation of higher education inc. making future fee uplifts in HE conditional on the quality of higher education delivered and the relevance to priority skills needs.
- Work with OfS to enable HEI's and FE providers to gain awarding powers for HTQ's
- A consultation on the new level 2 and 3 pathways

Reforming *Level 2 and 3 pathways*

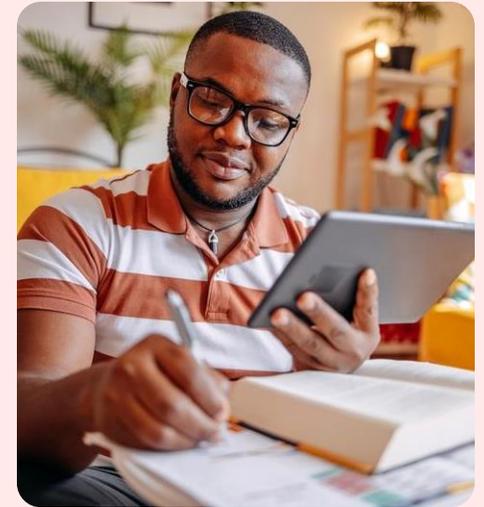
V Levels:

- Replacing over 900 current Level 3 qualifications with V Levels, which will become the only level 3 vocational qualification pathway for 16 to 19-year-olds.
- V levels to be offered in a range of subjects covering key skills sectors, based on nationally set content.
- The content will be linked to occupational standards and DfE expects that new V Levels will be similar in size to an A level to be easily combined with other V Levels or A levels, to allow learners flexibility.

Level 2 Reform

- DfE/Skills England will work with schools, colleges and awarding organisations to develop two clear post-16 pathways at level 2 (occupational pathway and further study pathway).

We are awaiting the governments response to the post-16 consultation, which will impact how lvl 2/3 pathways are shaped.



Youth Guarantee & *Living Wage*

£1.5 billion

is being made available over the spending review period for investment in employment and skills support. This funds £820 million for the Youth Guarantee. There are also changes to the minimum wage and more support for those with health or disability conditions.

Work Placements

Includes offering a guaranteed six-month paid work placement for every eligible 18-to 21 year old who has been on Universal Credit and looking for work for 18 months – helping young people across Great Britain take that crucial first step into sustained employment.

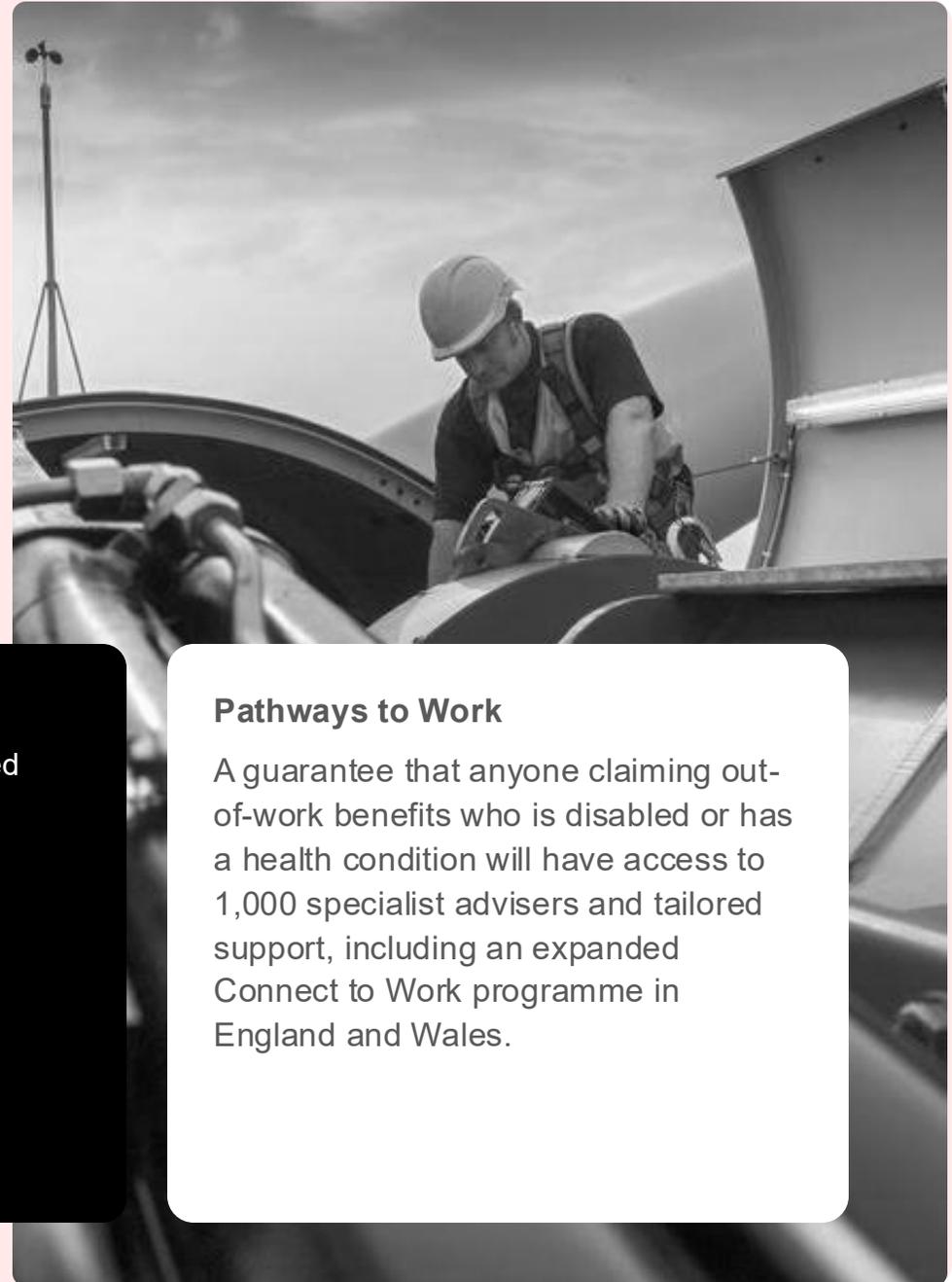
Government-backed jobs

Roll out from Spring 2026 in high need areas, including:

- Birmingham & Solihull
- East Midlands
- Greater Manchester
- Hertfordshire & Essex
- Central & East Scotland
- Southwest & Southeast Wales

Pathways to Work

A guarantee that anyone claiming out-of-work benefits who is disabled or has a health condition will have access to 1,000 specialist advisers and tailored support, including an expanded Connect to Work programme in England and Wales.



Youth *Guarantee*

Creates **350,000** new workplace opportunities designed to support young people into employment in sectors including:

- ✓ Construction
- ✓ Health & social care
- ✓ Hospitality

900,000 young people on Universal credit to receive a dedicated work support session, followed by four weeks of additional support

Government backed jobs to support **55,000** young people

Young people will be referred to one of **6 pathways**

- Work
- Work experience
- Apprenticeship
- Wider training
- Learning
- Workplace training programme

Youth Hubs

New youth hubs to be opened which will offer employability skills, coaching, CV support and job search help

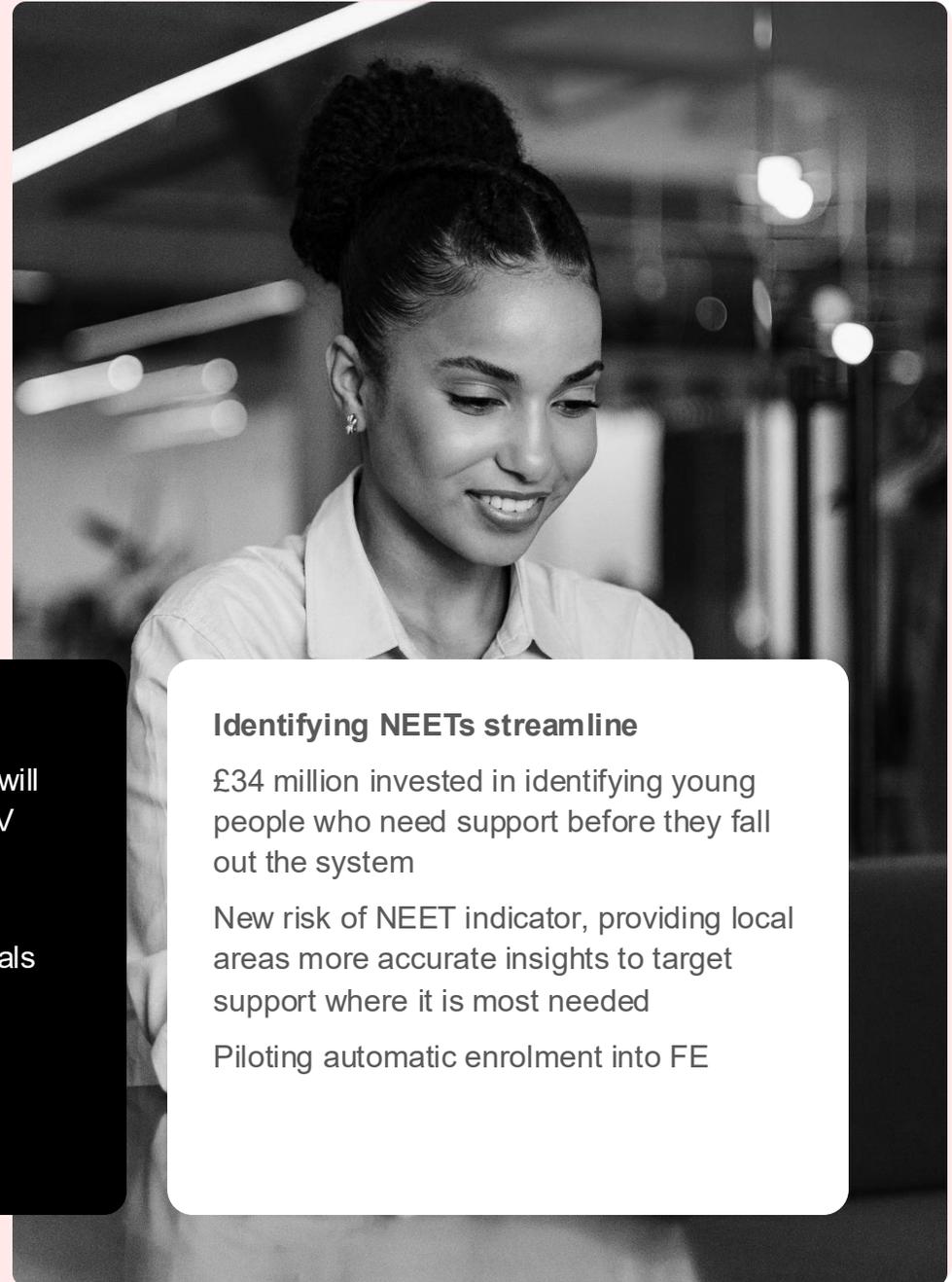
These hubs will match jobs with local suitable candidates, streamline referrals and provide ongoing support.

Identifying NEETs streamline

£34 million invested in identifying young people who need support before they fall out the system

New risk of NEET indicator, providing local areas more accurate insights to target support where it is most needed

Piloting automatic enrolment into FE



Integrated settlements for *Mayoral Strategic Authorities*

To empower Mayors with greater funding flexibility to drive growth in their regions, for 2026-27 to 2029-30 through integrated settlements.

Gov has confirmed at least £13 billion of devolved funding for:

- ✓ Greater London Mayoral Strategic Authorities
- ✓ Greater Manchester,
- ✓ West Midlands,
- ✓ West Yorkshire,
- ✓ South Yorkshire,
- ✓ Liverpool City Region,
- ✓ The North East

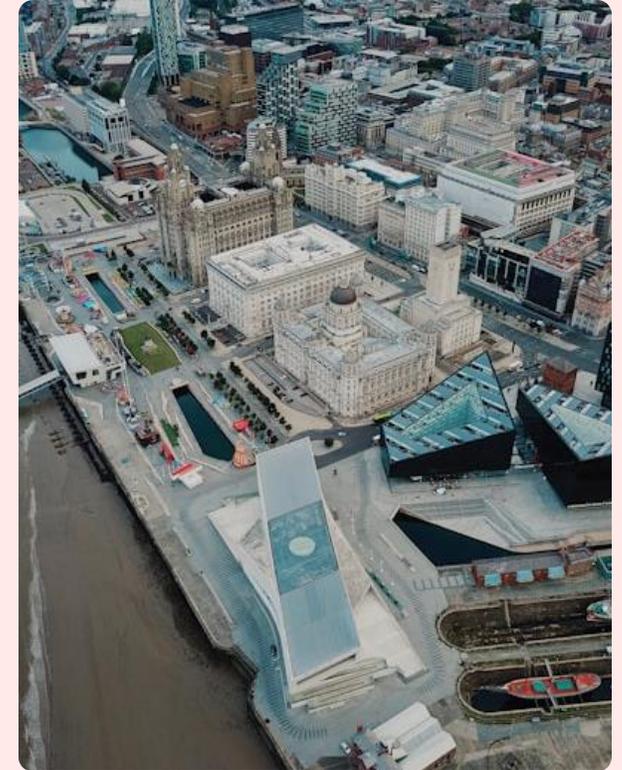


What have MSAs *done so far*

Here are some of the flexibilities MSAs have introduced

- ✓ Greater London – Fully fund some level 4 qualifications for learners
- ✓ Liverpool – Significantly increased the low wage threshold to £35,864
- ✓ Manchester – Ensured everyone regardless of age or income are entitled to their first full lvl 2 qualification, fully funded
- ✓ Tees Valley – Fully fund some learners for provision where they are aiming to change careers, even if they have an existing lvl 2/3 qualification

This is the beginning; we can expect to see more MSAs taking creative control of their ASF budget.





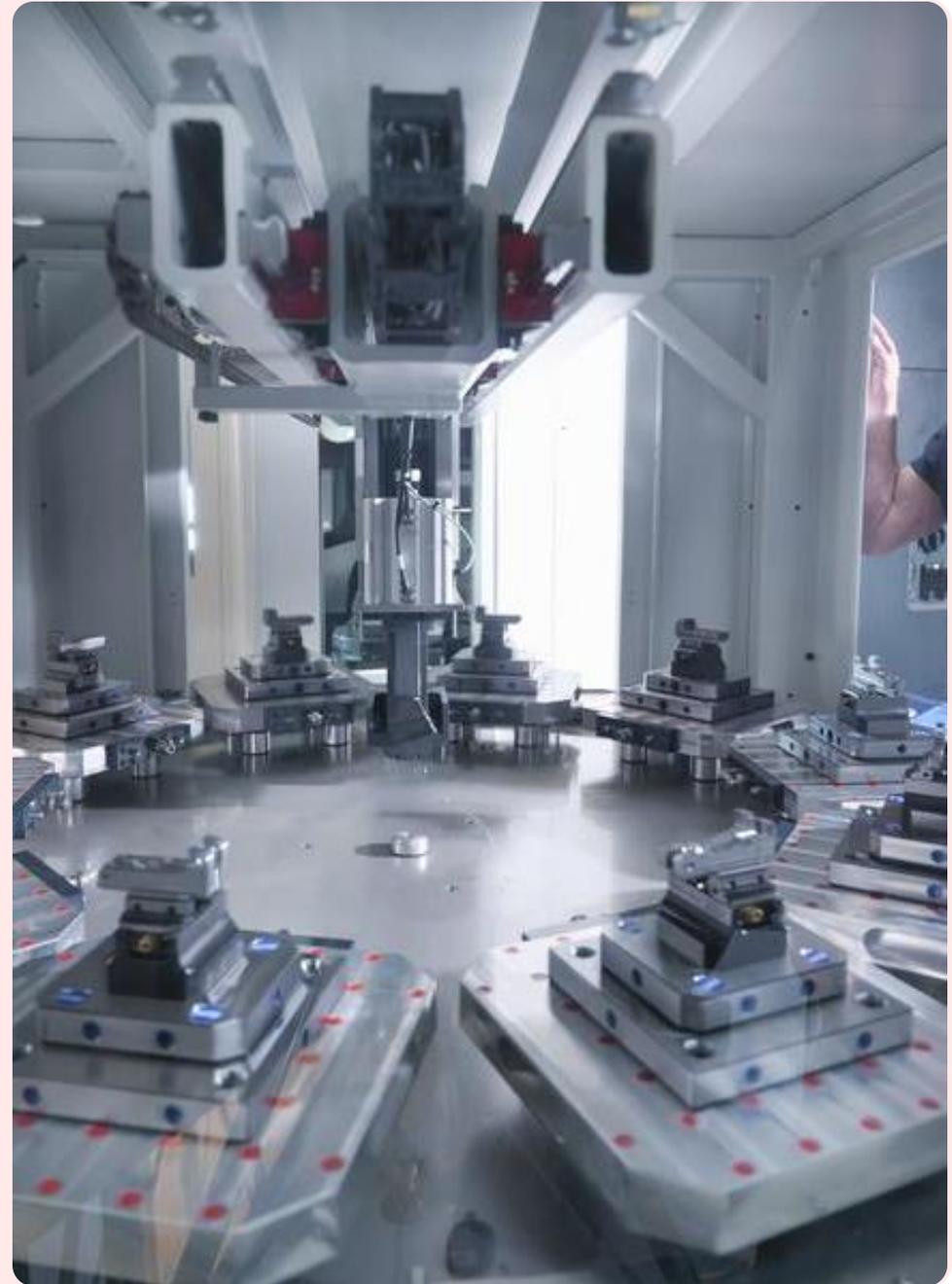
Skills England *Key Themes*

- Technological change is a major driver of changing skills needs across sectors, with a substantial and growing demand for digital and wider technology skills.
- Long-standing skills shortages in non-technical areas continue to affect multiple priority sectors and will continue to be a key driver of skills needs over coming years.
- Demand for degree level training and above, particular in STEM and related subjects, will continue to dominate some priority sectors.
- There is a pressing need for technical skills at levels 4 and 5, so Higher Technical Qualifications (HTQs). There is also demand for L2 and 3 in critical sectors such as construction.
- All training routes will need to meet the need for cross-cutting, durable skills for employment and ensure upskilling/reskilling throughout workers careers.
- Excellent careers advice, linked to education and training choices, will be vital for both younger people and those in work to match individuals to opportunities

Skills England

Priorities for the Future

- **Increase the reactivity of the apprenticeships system** to better keep pace with rapidly changing technologies and skill needs across sectors.
- **Develop 'bolt-on' training to supplement prior learning and attainment**, particularly across AI and digital skill areas and in transferable skills such as management and leadership to drive growth across priority sectors. Done through apprenticeships units
- **Build on the success of existing programmes such as Skills Bootcamps** to provide accelerated training programmes in skill areas relevant to priority sectors, for example including AI and cloud-based development in the fintech industry.
- **Further develop and expand portable apprenticeships** to support occupations that often have shorter-term or less predictable working patterns.
- **Reduce the administrative tasks and complexity** of the current apprenticeship system for employers.



How will skills needs influence FE?

Local Skills *Improvement* Plans (LSIPs)

What are LSIPs

- LSIPs identify local skills shortages and provision mismatches, they influence provision developments in local areas
- There is overlap and communication between LSIPs and other government documentation such as local growth plans.
- LSIPs last 3 years, but are regularly reviewed.



What's new

- LSIPs boundaries have been re-written to align with new strategic authority areas, bringing the total to 9 LSIPs
- New LSIPs to be developed from October
- Expected release in Summer 2026
- There will be a new LSIP template
- College's ability to respond to local skills needs will now be assessed by Ofsted
- The development of LSIPs are ran by Employer Representative Bodies, who can be found here:

[Local skills improvement plans and designated employer representative bodies - GOV.UK](#)





IS8+2 *Priority Sectors*

Skills England initial report from Sept 2024 identified 8 priority sectors, with 2 more being added due to severe skill shortages:

- construction
- health & social care
- advanced manufacturing,
- creative
- digital technologies
- clean energy
- financial services
- defence
- life sciences
- professional & business services

Each sector priority report analysis provides their understanding of –

- priority skills and jobs in each sector
- the training routes into each sector
- the gaps in provision

Apprenticeships

Apprenticeship

Approval Times

- Apprenticeship approval times to be reduced to as little as **3 months**.
(*Current approval time is 18 months*).
- If successful, this will support keeping apprenticeship content up to date with industry standards.
- The system will use occupational experts to meet specific needs and focus on making quick revisions to existing standards.
- There is limited detail on how they will be accelerating the approval process, which does put in place questions about cutting corners.





Apprenticeship

Clearing & Digital Services

Apprenticeship Clearing

- The government will pilot a university style 'clearing system'.
- Learners who narrowly missed out on opportunities will be matched with similar opportunities.
- To be rolled out later this year.

Apprenticeship Digital Service

- The government are planning to release a new digital services.
- This will bring together all key apprenticeship information into one place.
- This will include data on earnings & apprenticeship progression.
- Candidates may use this information to compare apprenticeship information.

Apprenticeship *Accountability Changes*

- Changes to apprenticeship accountability measures **brought in from January.**
- Accountability framework **updated to better fit Ofsted's new framework**

Three performance indicators:

- At risk.
- Needs improvement.
- On track.

Ofsted at risk indicators:

- Urgent improvement judgement for leadership & governance or inclusion at whole provider level.
- Not met judgement for safeguarding.
- Urgent improvement for any provision type level evaluations for apprenticeships.

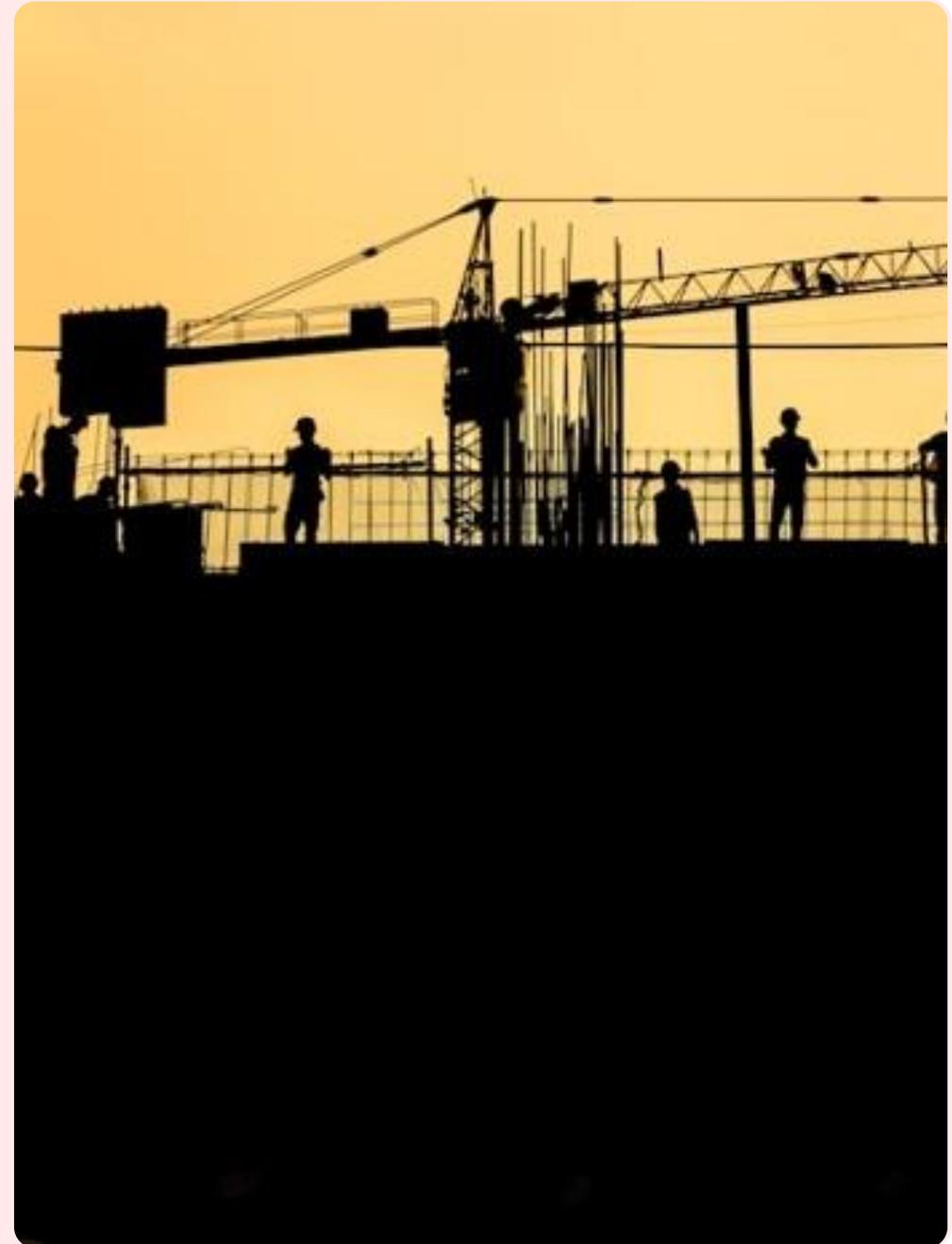
Ofsted needs improvement indicators:

- Needs attention judgement for leadership & governance or inclusion at whole provider level.
- Needs attention judgement for any provision type level evaluation are for apprenticeships.
- Insufficient progress assessment at new provider monitoring.

Apprenticeship

Accountability Changes

- DFE will not take “contribution to meeting skills needs” into account as part of the accountability framework.
- Training providers not yet inspected under the new Ofsted framework will continue to be classified under the old framework.
- Apprentices Past Planned End Date (APPED) now focuses solely on learners who are continuing training and are passed their planned end date.
 - 15% or more apprentices APPED – At risk
 - 10%-14% of apprentices APPED – Needs improvement
- Providers have the opportunity to bring forward mitigating circumstances when account managers contact them for a review.
- Apprentices with protected characteristics and from disadvantaged backgrounds will be considered in a review.



Apprenticeship reforms:

The future landscape

Minimum Duration Reduced:

- Minimum apprenticeship duration reduced from **12 months to 8 months** (or 187 off-the-job training (OTJT) hours).
- No more complex OTJT calculations required. Each Standard now has a fixed minimum requirement for OTJT hours, calculated by DfE.
- Designed to improve flexibility and access – prior learning and accelerated apprenticeships.

Gov to streamline apprenticeship standards.

End-Point Assessment (EPA) Reforms:

- EPA is now apprenticeship assessment
- All assessment no longer needs to be at the end of the programme
- Providers can conduct some of the assessment

Foundation Apprenticeships Introduced:

- New **Level 2 Foundation Apprenticeships** launched for 16–21-year-olds.
- Limited demand in launch year
- Development into more sectors may increase popularity





Apprenticeship Feb Reforms *Approved*

First batch of new reformed standards approved.

Apprenticeship Route	L3	L4	L5	L6	L7	Total
Care services				1		1
Health and science	2	1	4	16	4	27
Legal, finance and accounting					1	1
Overall Total	2	1	4	17	5	29

- Available for starts from 25th March 2026.
- Additional standards will be released via Skills England Revision Report.
- Minimum hours for compliance has been inserted into new reformed standards.



Apprenticeship *units*

What we know:

- (Phase 1) From April 2026
- Short courses in Digital, AI and Engineering, called Apprenticeship Units.
- Apprenticeship units will complement existing apprenticeships and be based on employer-designed occupational standards using quality-assured knowledge and skills, giving employers confidence around their legitimacy, content and quality of training.
- Talk of there being no minimum spend on units

What we don't know:

The Funding Model

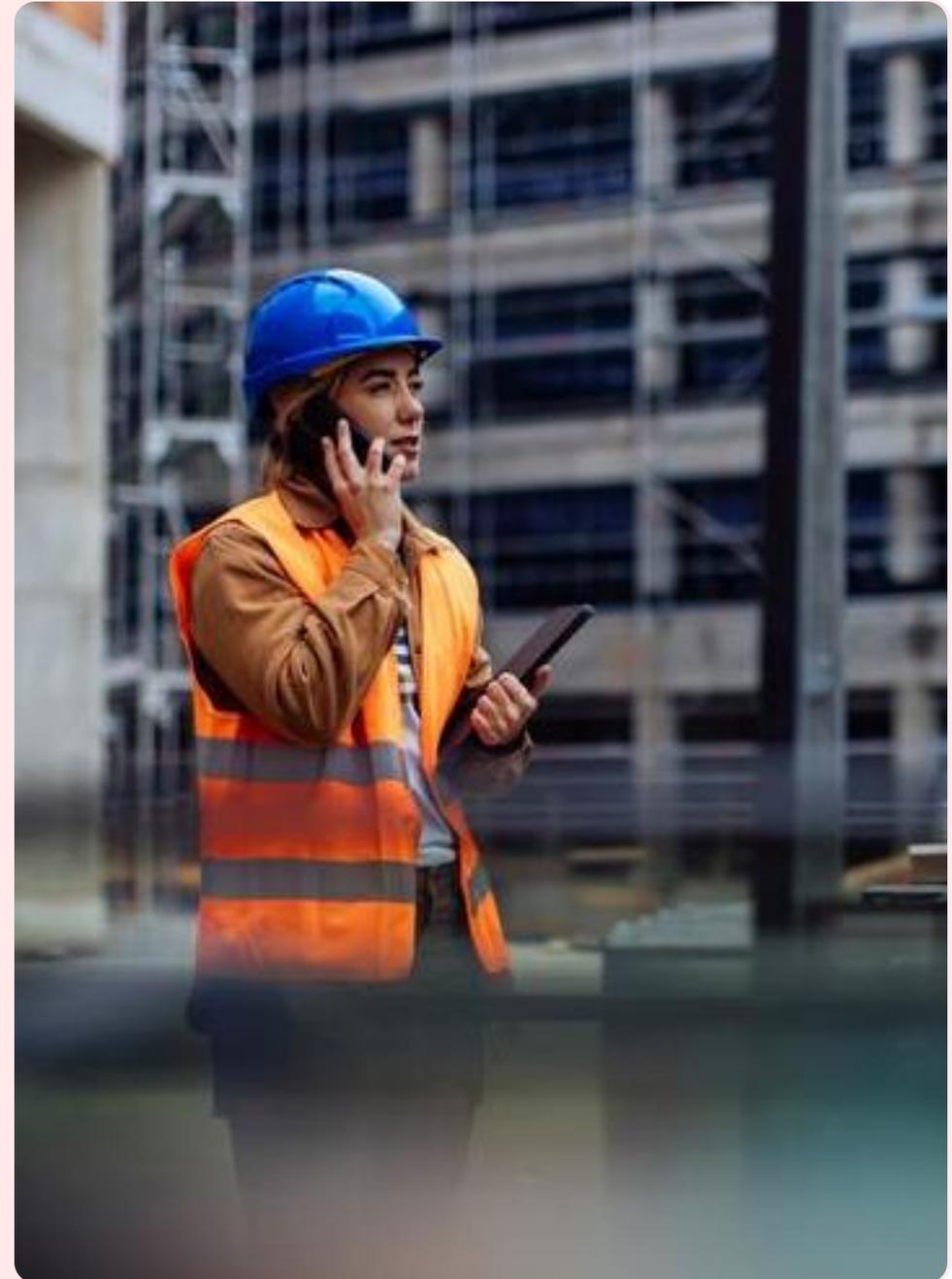
- Fully funded
- Co-Investment
- Conditionality/eligibility criteria

Employer Eligibility

- Levy payers?
- Non-levy payers?

Levy funding *changes*

- Currently, **employers levy** is clawed back after 2 years, if unused. This **now drops to 12 months**.
- Removal of the uplift introduced in 2017, where the Gov contributed 10% on top of employer's levy contribution. **Employers will have less levy funding visible in their account.**
- Currently, when an employer's levy funds run out, they can continue to take on apprentices, with the government paying 90% of the cost and employers contributing 10%. **This Gov contribution will now drop to 75% and employers will be expected to contribute 25% of the costs.**
- **Removal of the co-investment costs for SMEs for all apprentices under 25** (previously, SMEs had to contribute 5% of costs).
 - We don't yet know if levy payers who have run out of funds will pay the co-investment for learners under 25.
- SE will work with employers to streamline the suite of apprenticeship standards available (there are currently over 700 standards).
- More details on the wider Youth Guarantee and Growth and Skills Levy package will be announced shortly (early 2026).





Privately funded *apprenticeships*

- Gov are introducing additional provider requirements and checks for those delivering privately funded apprenticeships.
- Private apprenticeships can still class as apprenticeships if they align to standards and follow the principles of an apprenticeship.
- If the learner is working under a valid English apprenticeship agreement, they are legal considered an apprentice and may be paid the apprenticeship minimum wage.
- Privately funded apprentices may still have class 1 national insurance exemptions if they are under 25.
- No incentive payments will be paid for private apprenticeships.
- The provider must be on the APAR and have a signed apprenticeship agreement.

In *Summary*

- ✓ We anticipate DWP will have a focus on NEETs and market entry.
- ✓ There is a growing expectation that employers contribute to training.
- ✓ New level 2 & 3 pathways will significantly change 16-19 provision.
- ✓ Apprenticeship units and assessment reforms will change the face of apprenticeships.
- ✓ Gov to streamline apprenticeship standards.
- ✓ We are seeing significant levy funding changes, such as funds expiring in 12 months.
- ✓ Funding will be directed to local and national skills needs.
- ✓ Devolution will continue to significantly impact the Adult Skills Fund.



We would like to say

Thank you



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We work with Governments, employers, training providers, colleges and industry stakeholders to design and deliver high-quality training, qualifications, assessments and credentials that lead to meaningful career progression. We understand the life changing link between skills development, social mobility and success. Our solutions span critical sectors including construction, engineering, transport, energy and electrical, serving over 1 million learners annually.

Through our comprehensive portfolio of brands and trusted global network, we set industry-wide standards for technical, behavioural and commercial skills to improve performance and productivity. We believe you can achieve your potential - and we're here to help make it happen.

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