

Post-16 Education and Skills White Paper

Positive Intent and Ambition, but Questions Remain

Tuesday, 21 October 2025

Energy & Utility Skills Group welcomes the publication of the Post-16 Education and Skills White Paper as a positive and necessary step in strengthening the nation's skills system. It sets out ambition and intent, but questions remain about how delivery, coherence and pace will match the scale of the opportunity. While the White Paper applies directly to England, its implications extend across all four nations through shared ambitions for the energy transition, delivery of unprecedented investment in water, productivity and inclusion.

Prestige and World Class

The White Paper's intent to create a prestigious further education system alongside a world class higher education system is a positive and necessary signal. The introduction of Skills England, the emphasis on working with employers, and the continued focus on retraining and reskilling all align with the ambitions set out in our Skills Strategy 2025 to 2030.

Our workforce demand analysis shows that the energy and utilities sector alone must attract and recruit more than 312,000 new people by 2030, with over half at Level 3 or below. A reformed post-16 system that values technical and vocational excellence equally with academic achievement is essential to meeting this national challenge, and to deliver the generational opportunities for citizens across the UK.

We welcome the recognition that the nation's growth depends on developing people with the right skills, confidence and opportunity. The White Paper's focus on social mobility, inclusion and regional balance complements our own mission and that of our members.

Employer Led Standards

High quality jobs do not necessarily require high level academic qualifications. A four-year electrician apprenticeship, or equivalent vocational pathway, represents a gold standard in professional training and should be recognised as such. Technical

competence, safety and productivity define excellence in our sector and across the essential industries that power the economy.

We are concerned that public debate risks focusing on what is being removed, such as BTECs, rather than on the model that replaces them. The next phase of reform must prioritise vocational learning and ensure a national curriculum underpinned by employer led standards. This will give young people, adults and career changers the confidence that their learning directly connects to work and opportunity.

We also call for greater clarity on how Skills England will coordinate with Sector Skills Bodies, DESNZ, DEFRA, DWP and devolved governments to ensure coherent delivery across the United Kingdom. Coherence between industrial policy, education reform and workforce planning will determine whether the system truly meets the needs of employers and citizens across the UK.

Growth and Skills Levy

The Growth and Skills Levy represents the delivery of a key Labour Party manifesto commitment and reflects the reasonable expectation from business that this reform would be implemented early in the new Parliament. The White Paper signals clear intent to create greater flexibility in how employers use levy funding through the introduction of short modular learning and apprenticeship units, both underpinned by employer designed occupational standards, and to position the Levy alongside the Adult Skills Fund as part of a streamlined public investment system in adult skills.

We are pleased to see the White Paper use the language of courses rather than qualifications. For too long, a product led approach to skills has constrained innovation and limited the responsiveness that employers need. The Growth and Skills Levy provides an opportunity to move beyond that constraint and design a system built around competence, flexibility and progression. This marks a shift towards a more agile and employer focused model of skills investment that can better meet the demands of industry and the workforce of the future.

Names matter. The use of the term apprenticeship unit must be defined carefully to preserve quality, public confidence and the integrity of full apprenticeships and should not imply or be perceived that the Growth and Skills Levy is designed to only fund components of existing standards in England and frameworks in Scotland.

The White Paper states that the Growth and Skills Levy will fund short, flexible apprenticeship units and modular courses built around employer designed occupational standards. This is of particular importance to our sector. Energy & Utility Skills leads on occupational standards for energy, water, and waste and writes the national occupational standards for Scotland and Wales. These standards define the skills, knowledge and behaviours that form each unit of funded learning and will underpin levy eligibility, quality assurance and transferability across sectors and regions.

Next Steps

Our immediate priorities are threefold.

- 1) November: To submit the member informed and industry led list of Growth and Skills Levy funded courses for first delivery from April 2026. The submission and list sets out sector priorities and practical proposals for implementation.
- 2) December: To host Skills England at our [CEO Council](#) meeting ensuring direct dialogue between industry and national policy leaders.
- 3) Ongoing: To sustain our engagement with our memorandum of understanding and Skills Strategy endorsed partners, ensuring that the national ambitions outlined in the White Paper are delivered collaboratively and with measurable impact.

Paul Cox, Group Chief Executive, Energy & Utility Skills, said

“The White Paper sets a clear direction for reform. Our priority is to ensure that ambition turns into delivery through employer led standards and UK wide collaboration.

We share the government’s ambition for a prestigious, inclusive and responsive skills system. The intent is positive, the ambition is welcome, but questions remain about delivery, national coherence, timing and implementation.

Energy & Utility Skills is working with government and industry at pace to turn intent into impact, ensuring that reform delivers growth, opportunity and the skilled workforce needed to deliver the UK's future."

Notes to Editors

The Energy & Utility Skills Group (EUSG) is the authoritative voice on workforce and skills for the United Kingdom's energy, water, and waste sectors. EUSG represents 70 member organisations that collectively employ over 200,000 people directly, with many more within their supply chains, and have a combined member turnover exceeding £120 billion each year. Our validated data, national standards, and partnerships underpin workforce planning and skills investment across the four nations.

We convene members, employers, governments, trade unions, partners and training providers to ensure that skills policy and delivery reflect industry needs. EUSG sets national standards for safety and competence, manages the Energy & Utility Skills Register (EUSR), and provides assurance for more than 300,000 individuals holding over 800,000 safety-critical registrations. We also deliver careers and jobs services that support people and employers across the United Kingdom.

The recently published Energy & Utility Skills Group's Skills Strategy 2025 to 2030 provides a structured approach that complements the Clean Energy Jobs Plan. Anchored in four strategic pillars, Research, Attract, Develop, and Retain, it provides evidence, coordination, and insight to support workforce growth across the clean energy economy.

Read the full Skills Strategy 2025 to 2030 on the Energy & Utility Skills website:

<https://euskills.co.uk/about/our-strategy/skills-strategy/>

For more information or interview requests, contact The Energy & Utility Skills Group via email: enquiries@euskills.co.uk

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