

The Rt Hon Baroness Smith of Malvern

Minister for Skills
Department for Education
Department for Work and Pensions

13 July 2026

Ref: Apprenticeships and skills

Dear Minister,

Thank you for your recent [letter](#) commissioning Skills England to review apprenticeship funding bands. Together with your keynote speech at the AELP National Conference, it provides a clear statement of the Government's immediate apprenticeship priorities.

The Energy & Utility Skills Partnership (EUSP) CEO Council held one of its two planned annual meetings on Tuesday 23 June, with discussions closely aligned with the priorities set out in your letter and keynote speech. In addition, the [EUSP 2025-30 Skills Strategy](#) was launched at our conference that you attended last year and is endorsed by [over 20 partners](#).

A significant proportion of the June meeting focused on apprenticeships. Council considered opportunities to strengthen AI and data capability, maximise apprenticeship levy investment and identify practical policy reforms to support Government ambitions.

Council agreed immediate actions together with seven UK-wide policy priorities, four of which relate directly to apprenticeships. The remaining three policy priorities relate to wider workforce planning and regulatory reform and will be shared separately with the relevant departments and partners.

Our apprenticeship priorities reflect both the scale of the workforce challenge and the opportunity facing our sectors. More than 312,000 new people are required by 2030 to deliver planned investment and maintain essential services. They also reflect the sector's confidence in apprenticeships as an important route for developing safe, skilled and competent workers.

Key CEO Council considerations:

1. Apprenticeships continue to deliver exceptional long-term outcomes across our sectors. Employers shared examples of apprenticeship retention rates approaching 90% after ten years. This benefits employers, strengthens workforce resilience and delivers long-term value for taxpayers. Energy & Environment Awards, the leading awarding organisation for power, gas and water apprenticeships, reports average pass rates of over 95%, demonstrating the sector's commitment to high-quality apprenticeship training.

2. Council strongly supports the Government's ambition to increase opportunities for young people, particularly those who are not in education, employment or training. However, the EUSP CEO Council also cautioned against unintended consequences that could arise if future reforms disproportionately focus on younger learners at the expense of adult entrants. Safety-critical industries require new workers from every age group. Council identified those aged 21 to 24 as the greatest opportunity for increasing participation and welcomed our continuing work with DWP to develop sector-wide solutions through the Youth Guarantee.
3. UK-wide employers continue to experience unnecessary complexity because apprenticeship policy, funding and assessment differ across England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. Whilst recognising devolved responsibilities, Council believes greater alignment would reduce complexity, improve efficiency and enable employers operating across national boundaries to invest with greater confidence.
4. Achieving the Government's ambition for significantly higher apprenticeship participation will depend upon strengthening the pre-apprenticeship pipeline. Foundation Apprenticeships will contribute, but they are unlikely to be sufficient in isolation. Early EUSP Sector Entry pilots, delivered in partnership with the DWP, have already demonstrated strong employment outcomes (over 80% of participants progressed from programme completion into employment). The Sector Entry model provides a practical, scalable model for supporting more citizens into high-quality apprenticeships.
5. Council recognised that increasing apprenticeship participation will require continued efforts to raise awareness and understanding of apprenticeships amongst young people, parents, carers and educators. Council believes that continuing to strengthen careers information that promotes technical education and apprenticeships as high-quality routes into skilled employment will be important in achieving the Government's ambitions for workforce growth and participation.
6. Apprenticeship reform must continue to protect and prioritise occupational competence and public safety. Council welcomed the February 2026 Skills England blog post and the subsequent agreement to adopt a sector-specific, risk-based approach to protecting competence in safety-critical occupations.
7. Council recognised that apprenticeship growth will increasingly depend upon expanding the capacity of mentors, trainers and assessors. This constraint has already been evidenced through our engagement with the Migration Advisory Committee, DBT, DWP and DESNZ. Unless addressed, it risks becoming a limiting factor on apprenticeship growth and infrastructure delivery.
8. Council recognised the Government's intention to introduce greater flexibility through Foundation Apprenticeships and Apprenticeship Units. However, clearer progression routes and greater flexibility for Apprenticeship Units would better support workforce development, new technologies and career mobility.

CEO Council policy priorities:

1. Harness industry-led research and evidence to inform supportive and enabling regulation via price controls and contracting periods to enable a truly strategic approach to resilience, growth, and long-term workforce planning.
2. Protect competence and safety during apprenticeship reforms to maintain quality standards and increase supply.
3. Evolve, simplify and align apprenticeship funding, administration and delivery policy across the UK, enabling employers and the supply chain to invest more effectively through apprenticeships and maximise the impact of public and employer investment.
4. Remove disincentives for frontline staff to become trainers and assessors. This is essential to unlock capacity, avoid competence bottlenecks and prevent delays to infrastructure delivery.

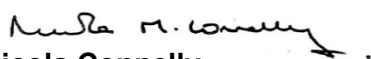
Proposed next steps:

1. We would welcome Rachel Thomas (Managing Director) and Steve Barrett (Director) being connected with the Skills England officials leading the apprenticeship funding band review. Their email addresses are included below.
2. We would welcome the opportunity for Skills England and EUSP members to explore these four UK apprenticeship priorities together as the apprenticeship reforms continue to progress. EUSP members stand ready to support Skills England and your officials by sharing evidence, testing policy proposals, scaling successful pilots and supporting implementation.

By working together, we can increase opportunities for citizens, strengthen workforce resilience, improve productivity, and ensure the skilled workforce needed to deliver the UK's infrastructure ambitions.

Please do not hesitate to contact us should you wish to discuss any aspect of this letter. We look forward to continuing our strong partnership with you, Skills England and governments across the UK.

Yours sincerely,



Nicola Connelly

EUSP CEO Council Co-Chair

Chief Executive

Scottish Power Energy

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Andrew Findlay

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