

The ACCA logo is a white square with the letters 'ACCA' in red. The background of the entire page is a vibrant red with a vertical wood-grain texture. In the lower half, there are dynamic, curved lines in shades of red, white, and blue, resembling a modern architectural design or a stylized representation of movement.

ACCA

Think Ahead

SKILLS DEVELOPMENT: POLICIES FOR ENHANCING THE EMPLOYER ECOSYSTEM

Foreword

We are deeply committed to advancing the profession that the world needs, developing professional accountants who support organisations across the UK and worldwide. One of the most significant challenges facing the UK economy is the need for skills and talent. Not only does this lead to productivity limitations, but it risks making the UK a less attractive place to invest and do business.

While organisations across various sectors continue highlighting the talent crunch they face, the UK has also witnessed a proliferation of education pathways and skills development initiatives. These efforts undoubtedly expand opportunities presented to individual learners and organisations, but they also introduce further complexity, which can hinder effective engagement with the skills training system. At the same time, employers face an increasingly challenging talent market, often unable to attract individuals with the skills and experience needed, and, in many cases, increasing employee mobility is making it more difficult than ever to retain talent.

Through engagement with key partners, stakeholders and members, we have developed key policy proposals to tackle the challenge that the widening skills gap across sectors presents to economic growth and productivity. Together, these proposals would provide a tangible incentive for organisations to upskill individuals to deliver the skills needed to grow and prosper, while enabling individuals to navigate the skills landscape more easily and ensure they identify the career pathway best suited to their individual goals and aspirations.

As an organisation, our founding mission is to ensure open access to the accountancy profession and an entry point for everyone. We remain dedicated to nurturing the next generation of forward-thinking professionals who will shape the future of finance and management, as well as offering every talented person everywhere the opportunity to experience a rewarding career in our profession.



Abdul Goffar
Director ACCA UK

Executive summary

The UK skills and employment landscape resembles not so much a crossroads as Spaghetti Junction – fast moving, potentially confusing and with far-reaching implications for the choices made by governments about the direction of travel. Industries from professional services to manufacturing face a critical talent shortage, exacerbated by an ever-widening skills gap. Expansion in the range of education and skills provision, such as T Levels (DfE 2023a) and Skills Bootcamps (DfE n.d.), in addition to more established routes to qualification, such as apprenticeships or university degrees, has created a wider range of choices for both individual learners and employers.

One of the unintended consequences of this expansion has been added complexity – leaving both employers and individuals struggling to navigate upskilling opportunities, which are key to economic growth and productivity. Addressing this challenge requires a fresh perspective, together with policy support for organisations seeking to upskill their workforce. We make two policy recommendations to further these aims.

1

Introduction of a Skills Tax Credit Pilot.

This targeted incentive will empower organisations currently eligible for the Employment Allowance to begin bridging the gaps they face in digital, sustainability and financial competence skills by offsetting up to £5,000 of the cost of selected accredited training from their tax liabilities. By addressing the impact of chronic under-investment in training, this approach would drive economic growth and productivity, the global competitiveness of the UK as a country to do business in, and support individual staff retention and growth within organisations.

2

While a boost to training would be welcome by organisations across the economy, additional support is needed to strengthen the entry-level pipeline available for employers. To enable this, we propose

a government-led baseline assessment of the career guidance and support currently available in England. In the current landscape, guidance and support for individuals and organisations is fragmented, with variable quality and availability across sectors and geographies. An assessment would provide the government with the data needed to identify gaps or weaknesses in provision, improve underperforming regions and empower individuals to access new opportunities in an environment with fast-changing skills needs.

Taken together, we believe this two-step approach could help employers to improve training for existing staff, while creating a wider pool of future talent. In addition to empowering individuals, this would help the UK to close widening skills gaps across all sectors and ensure our careers service is well positioned to take advantage of the new age of opportunities, from data and digital developments to the green economy.



For further information:

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ACCA

Introduction

As the global body for professional accountants, at ACCA we are committed to offering everyone everywhere the opportunity to experience a rewarding career in accountancy, finance and management. Through our qualifications and learning opportunities, we develop strategic business leaders and forward-thinking professionals with the financial business and digital experience needed for the creation of sustainable organisations and flourishing societies.

Globally, we are a thriving community of over 247,000 members and 526,000 students (future members), geographically based in 181 countries. In the UK we have over 98,000 members working up and down the country, across all sectors, public and private, from micro businesses to large firms, helping individuals, businesses and other organisations to thrive.

Since 1904, being a force for public good has been embedded in ACCA's purpose. We believe that accountancy is a cornerstone profession of society and is vital in helping economies, organisations, and individuals to grow and prosper. It does this by creating robust, trusted financial and business management, combating corruption, ensuring organisations are managed ethically, driving sustainability, and providing rewarding career opportunities.

Through ACCA's engagement with members and key stakeholders across the UK, we have been struck by the scale of the challenge facing organisations of all sizes and across all sectors when seeking to recruit and retain the talent they need. Over the past number of months, we have spoken to a broad range of stakeholders to explore in more detail the data and insights we have acquired relating to skills challenges across the UK.

These stakeholders, across the UK, include large, small and medium-sized private and public sector employers, in addition to professional education providers and universities delivering education across a broad range of subject areas, both virtually and face to face, and partners with experience and expertise in education and skills training.

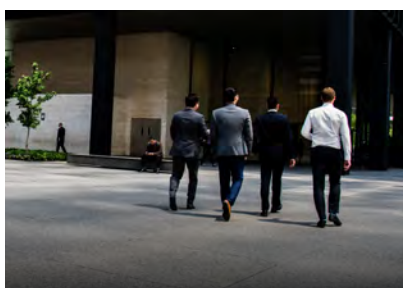
In addition to gathering the expertise and experience of stakeholders from across these organisations, we have drawn additional information from external publications and data sources on skills in the UK, as well as a range of ACCA survey data and insights gained from engagement across sectors.





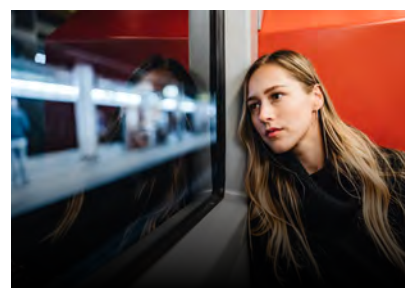
ACCA Global Talent Trends 2024 (ACCA 2024)

A survey of almost 10,000 professional accountants from across the accountancy profession, over 1,200 of whom are based in the UK. This research provides a unique and vital insight into how people view key workplace- and talent-related issues.



ACCA Employer Survey

Feedback from over 300 UK employers about how they are responding to challenges with recruitment and retention as well as their recruitment and training intentions.



Groundbreakers: Gen Z and the future of accountancy (ACCA 2021)

This study of over 9,000 respondents across the globe explores employers' views of the COVID-19 pandemic, and its impacts on the evolving 'transformation of work' and on human capital, as well as practical insights for employers on leading practices for hiring, developing and retaining talent.

Drawing on these different sources, the paper proposes two key policy recommendations designed to improve access to skills training. These recommendations seek to support the government's broader levelling-up objectives as well as both employers and individuals. This policy paper also contains predictions of levels of engagement with specific policy recommendations – these assumptions are based on publicly available data referenced within the paper.

We would like to thank all our members and stakeholders who contributed to this research, without whom our work would not be possible.

A man in a white shirt is standing on a balcony, looking at a tablet. The background shows a cityscape at sunset with warm, golden light and blurred lights from buildings. The man is smiling slightly and looking down at the tablet.

1. An employer-led skills system

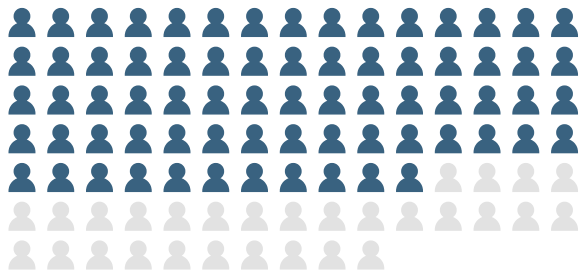
1. An employer-led skills system

ACCA members and employers across the UK express significant concern about skills availability, frequently in relation to an organisation’s ability to recruit the talent it needs to grow and prosper. While the UK is a major economy, some regions of the UK experience the benefits of success more than others.

The Government's Skills for Jobs White Paper (DfE 2021) details a shift towards an employer-led training system, which was welcomed by organisations of all sizes, including ACCA. There have been many policy interventions aimed at reducing regional economic inequality by tackling skills challenges over the past decade, an example being the introduction of Local Skills Improvement Plans (DfE 2023b). While these were designed to encourage greater regional decision-making and better measurement of skills demand at a local level, we believe much more must be done to significantly enhance employer investment in skills across the UK.

Such investment is crucial to closing skills gaps across all regions and sectors. Research published by the Institute for Fiscal Studies in 2023 demonstrates that the UK has seen a significant decline in investment in adult learning and training (Tahir 2023). That paper highlights that average employer spending on training has decreased by 27% per trainee since 2011. A Learning and Work Institute publication has also evidenced that in 2015 UK employers invested half as much per employee as the EU average (Clayton and Evans 2021). The research also found that, generally, countries with higher levels of productivity, including Switzerland and Norway, have higher rates of participation in job-related training.

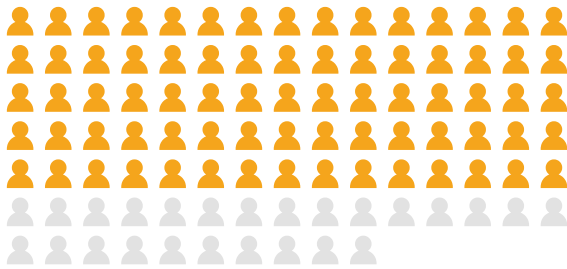
In a 2023 poll of over 300 ACCA employers, 71% stated that they plan to recruit in the coming year. The most commonly cited reason for needing to recruit is to bring new skills into the organisation, largely as a result of employee mobility. Our 2024 Global Talent Trends research surveyed over 1,200 professionals in the UK and indicates that over one-third (41%) of those currently employed in the profession in the UK expect to move on to their next role within 12 months, with 54% of those seeking to move expecting their move to be external to their organisation (ACCA 2024). In our engagement with members of the workforce, a large majority cite the lack of training and development opportunities as one of the leading factors pushing them to move to a different organisation. This suggests that in order to retain talent and drive long-term sustainable growth, organisations across all sectors need to do more to support lifelong learning and training opportunities.



71% plan to recruit



1. AN EMPLOYER-LED SKILLS SYSTEM



75% plan to upskill / reskill staff

Our employer research also shows that 75% plan to upskill or reskill existing members of the workforce. However, employers also highlight that levels of complexity in navigating the skills landscape can be a key barrier to fulfilling training intentions. Smaller organisations, in particular, highlight cost and lack of resources as the most challenging factors in providing skills-development training to individuals.

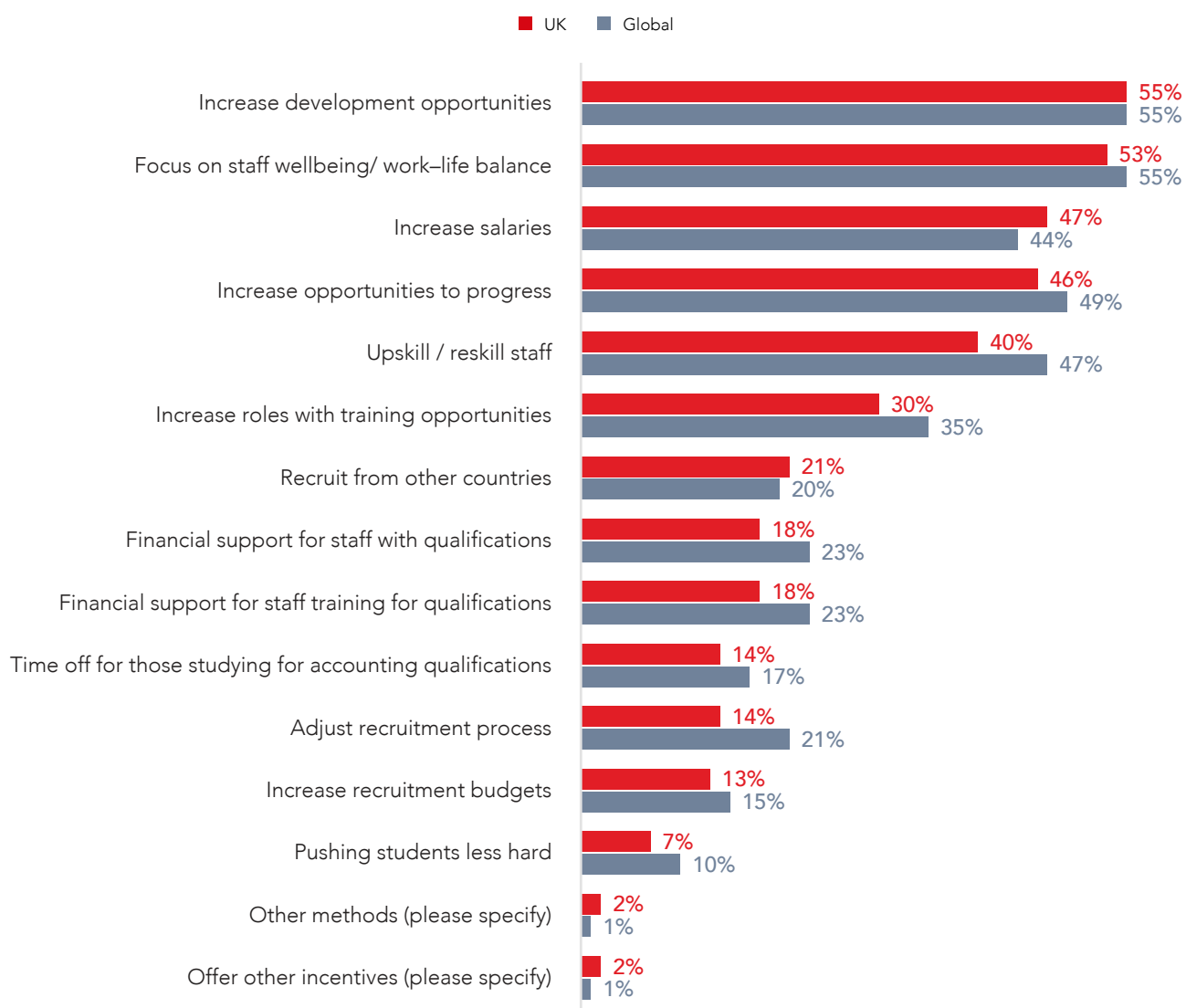


65% of UK employers have difficulty in recruiting or retaining finance staff

Almost two-thirds (65%) of UK respondents to our employers' survey reported facing difficulty in recruiting or retaining finance staff. Among actions employers were taking to address these challenges, increasing development opportunities was the top-ranked response, closely followed by a focus on staff wellbeing/work-life balance, with increasing salaries in third place.

While this indicates that employers are committed to exploring strategies to address staffing issues, many cited the inbuilt complexity in the skills and training landscape and lack of availability of funding for training as key barriers to offering training to employees. Among UK respondents to our Global Talent Trends research, 32% highlight a lack of relevant skills for the future of their business as one of their biggest work-related concerns.



Figure 1.1: ACCA Employer Survey – Changes to address staffing issues

When asked about planned recruitment to help meet skills needs over the coming 12 months, employers indicated a preference for qualified staff or those on their way to qualified status. Employers are open to recruiting individuals across a broad range of levels and backgrounds, and many express interest in vocational routes, such as apprenticeships. Ensuring that a broad range of high-quality provision remains accessible to those seeking to upskill or reskill members of the workforce is important, although, as highlighted above, many organisations report finding it difficult to navigate the inbuilt complexity of the skills landscape. It is equally important to ensure sufficient support for both individuals and employers to access skills training.



Figure 1.2: ACCA Employer Survey – Planned recruitment to help meet skills needs in next 12 months



Given the prevalence of concerns about the complexity of the system for employers seeking to address upskilling and retention, and the impact on the UK's economy of historic underinvestment, we believe that the government should explore enhanced support for organisations to engage more effectively with the skills training system and offer meaningful employee professional development opportunities, which drive growth and retention.

2. Supporting individuals in navigating complexity

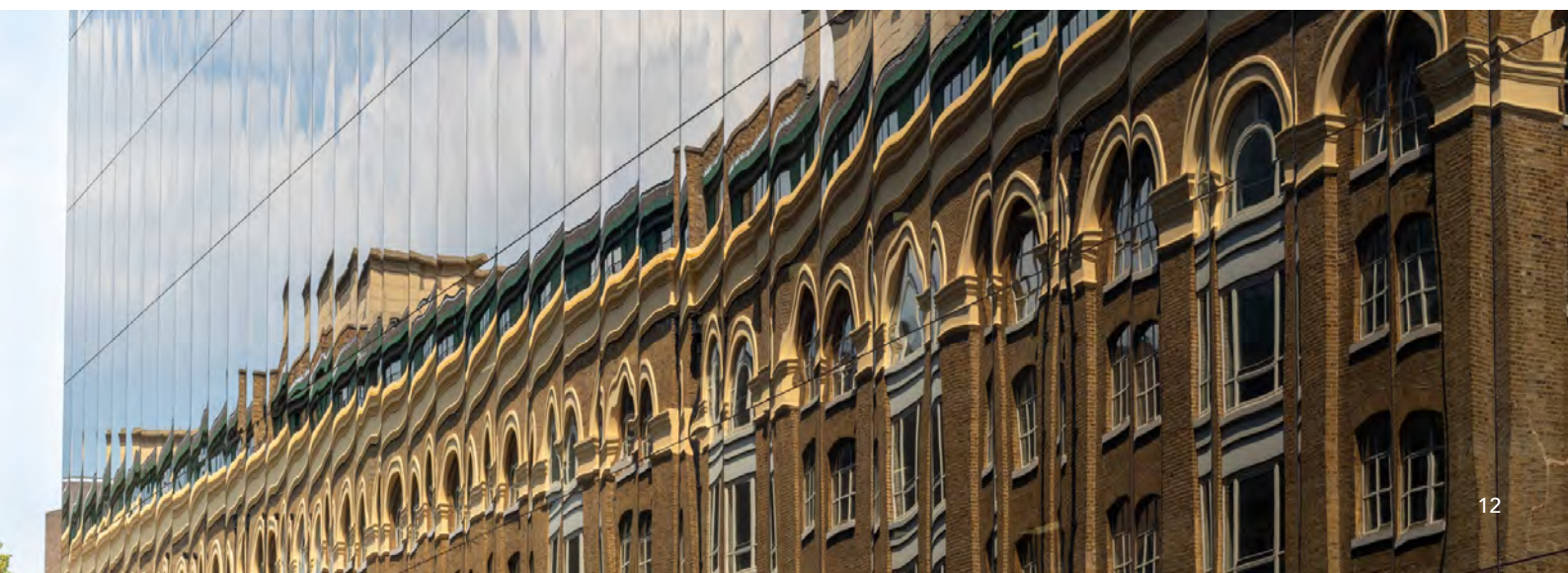
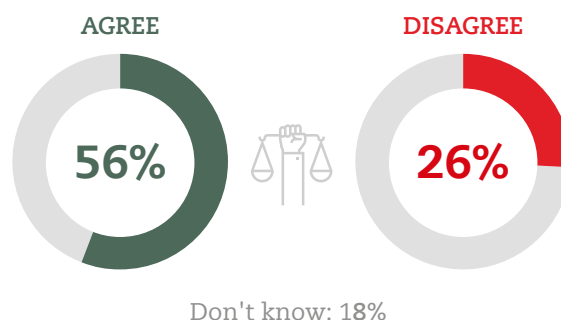
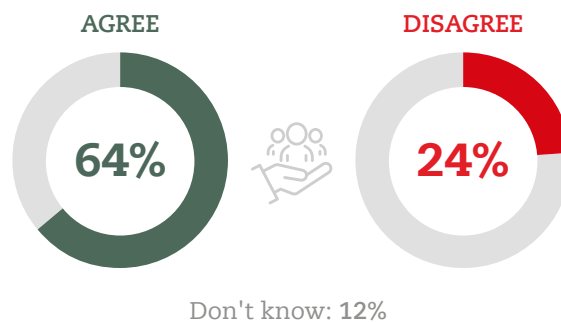
2. Supporting individuals in navigating complexity

The global pandemic has had a significant effect on younger people and a profound impact on job displacement (WEF 2020). ACCA research published as part of our Groundbreakers report (ACCA 2021) shows that almost three-fifths of UK respondents to our survey cited lack of job opportunities and job insecurity as a key concern. Personal wellbeing was another area where UK Gen Z respondents expressed concern.

In fact, concerns about wellbeing are not limited to Gen Z, with almost one-third (32%) of UK respondents to our Global Talent Trends 2024 research stating that they have considered resigning from their current organisation because of wellbeing issues (ACCA 2024). In the UK, 55% of respondents say that their mental health suffers because of work pressures. Ensuring that both current and future learners can understand and access the career and wellbeing support available to them will be key to their success. Similarly, it is more important than ever that we remain focused on ensuring that socially disadvantaged young people in the UK have opportunities to pursue enriching careers.

We explored different markers of diversity through our 2024 Global Talent Trends research. While results in the UK compare positively with many regions around the world, they also indicate that there is significant room for improvement. Almost two-thirds of respondents (64%) believe their organisation is inclusive, where all employees are equally valued and supported to make a meaningful contribution. But when asked whether they believe employees at their organisation have fair career opportunities, given their individual needs, only 56% agreed, with 44% either disagreeing or selecting 'don't know'. Ensuring equity of access to opportunity for all is crucial when considering new or enhanced forms of support for individuals and employers in tackling skills challenges.

Figure 2.1: Global Talent Trends 2024



Access to careers services that equip both individuals and employers with the support they need to upskill or reskill at any stage is crucial, not only to support individuals' wellbeing but also to encourage greater social mobility. Among respondents to our Gen Z research in the UK (ACCA 2021), 46% agree that long-term career prospects are the key attraction factor for accountancy.

In practice, feedback from our stakeholders indicates that the current career guidance landscape is too complex to navigate, and the quality of guidance varies depending on factors such as the location and background of the individual seeking guidance. In order to meet future labour market skills needs, advice available to individuals must be both highly accessible and reflect current and future employment skills needs.



3. Policy recommendations

3. Policy recommendations

The current education and skills landscape encompasses a wide range of different training types and funding mechanisms, all of which have been introduced by government to help meet ever-evolving employment skills needs across organisations of all sizes and across all sectors in the UK. Despite this, while the system has evolved in a well-intentioned way to respond to a variety of needs, we believe that the level of complexity in both schemes and funding is now a significant hindrance to employer uptake. To encourage greater employer investment in skills and to enable both individuals and employers to navigate this complexity, we make two policy recommendations.

1

Recommendation 1: Introduction of a skills tax credit pilot

Employers across all sectors of the economy are struggling to attract and retain the talent they need, despite positive upskilling intentions and actions to address recruitment and retention. Further, the evidence suggests that employers' investment in skills has declined over the past decade and lags significantly behind the EU average. Employers' investment in skills training has a critical role to play in closing skills gaps across the UK. It offers pathways for people to upskill and for wage progression.

In order to begin to address the UK's long-term decline in investment in skills, we believe that the introduction of a skills tax credit for employers who fund investment in skills and development would be a useful and welcome step which presents a range of benefits.

- A skills tax credit offers an opportunity to boost the global competitiveness of UK businesses by incentivising them to invest in a highly skilled workforce. This investment strengthens the UK's position on the global market and attracts new businesses and talent.
- It provides a tangible incentive for organisations of all sizes to encourage both current and future members of the workforce to build on their existing skills and qualifications.

The skills tax credit could help level the playing field for organisations of all sizes, fostering a fairer business environment and promoting the growth of a skilled and diverse workforce. A simple, comprehensive financial incentive would be the best way to address concerns about overly complex funding arrangements.

Were a skills tax credit made available to organisations of all sizes, to fund all forms of training, it would probably see significant employer uptake. We recognise that, while this might encourage far greater emphasis on upskilling and reskilling employees to close long-standing skills gaps across the economy, the scale of such implementation could prove challenging in the current economic environment. Thus, a scheme with a more limited scope would be preferable for the government.

To ensure a more targeted approach, we propose a scheme aimed at supporting the organisations most in need of additional support. This would involve initially piloting a skills tax credit for smaller organisations; feedback from our network consistently indicates these organisations most often lack the financial resources to invest in the training their employees need. This could be achieved by applying the same eligibility criteria that currently exist under the Employment Allowance (Gov.uk n.d.a), core eligibility criteria for which include but are not limited to:

- businesses or charities with employers' Class 1 National Insurance liabilities of less than £100,000 in the previous tax year
- parts of a group of charities or companies (also known as connected companies), where the total employers' Class 1 National Insurance liabilities for the group are less than £100,000.

For companies that have or had more than one employer PAYE reference, the total employers' Class 1 National Insurance liabilities for the combined payrolls would need to be less than £100,000 in the previous tax year.

Under this pilot skills tax credit, employers eligible to reduce their annual National Insurance liability by up to £5,000 under the Employment Allowance, would also be eligible to reduce their annual National Insurance liability by up to an additional £5,000 if they funded eligible employee skills development training.

In addition to the above eligibility criteria, which focus on employer eligibility, we would support additional eligibility criteria for the types of training that are eligible as part of the skills tax credit. Our survey data and conversations with employers and partners consistently highlight three key areas of acute skills shortages across all sectors:

1. digital technology
2. sustainability
3. financial competence

3. POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

If the provision available as part of the skills tax credit during the initial pilot was limited to these three areas, we believe it would have the most significant impact on driving productivity for employers and the wider economy. Programmes with existing employer funding streams, such as apprenticeships, would not be part of the provision eligible for this skills tax credit, given the existing funding support available. A range of accredited provision, including from chartered professional bodies across these areas, would ensure high-quality provision and the maximum impact from this incentive, while keeping the range of training available for organisations to choose from as wide and flexible as possible within this framework.

Similar skills tax credits exist across a range of regions and territories around the world, including in New York, USA, where The Employee Training Incentive Program provides refundable tax credits to New York State employers for skills training that upgrades or improves the productivity of their employees (New York State n.d.). Businesses can also receive tax credits for approved internship programmes that provide training in advanced technology, life sciences, software development or clean energy. The programme provides a credit of up to \$10,000 per employee for eligible training costs and is targeted at businesses in 'strategic industries'.

By operating the incentive as an employer tax credit delivered through the existing tax administrative framework (Employment Allowance), there would be minimal additional set up costs. It also reduces the risks of exploitation that accompany any direct cash payment through a grant process. Official statistics published by His Majesty's Revenue and Customs (HMRC) on Employment Allowance take-up for the 2022–23 tax year indicate that 1,171,000 employers benefited from the Employment Allowance during this tax year.

All parliamentary constituencies continued to have employers that benefit from the Employment Allowance and 85% of companies claiming the Employment Allowance are 'micro' employers (with from one to nine employees).

While it is challenging to predict what the likely level of uptake would be for our proposed skills tax credit during the first year, it would be driven by availability of provision and employer awareness of the incentive. If 5% of those currently benefiting from the Employment Allowance were to make use of the Skills Tax credit, this could mean that approximately 60,000 employers could benefit from the first year of the pilot. It is important to note that 60,000 employers participating in this pilot in one year is quite ambitious as the government's 'Help to Grow: Management – UK' (Gov.uk n.d.b) programme, announced in 2021, had attracted only 8,000 enrolments as of February 2024 (Gov.uk 2024), though its ambition is to support up to 30,000 by 2025. The uptake of this proposed new skills tax credit would achieve uptake from 60,000 employers only with significant and highly effective promotion and awareness raising, and uptake in the initial year could be lower than this amount.

The cost of supporting 60,000 organisations with this new £5,000 skills tax credit would be £300 million. Given that the uptake would be lower during the initial years of the pilot, this is likely to be the maximum relief claimed. In comparative terms, this amount is significantly less than the amount of unused apprenticeship levy funds returned to the Treasury in the last reported financial year 2020–21, which stood at £604m, as shown in Figure 3.1, the amount of unused levy funds had increased consistently year on year over the previous four years (Camden 2022). We believe that this skills tax credit offers significant value for investment by supporting the smallest organisations across the UK economy with upskilling across some of the fastest-evolving areas most in need of skill development to enhance productivity and growth.

Figure 3.1: Apprenticeship funding returned to treasury

Apprenticeship	FY 17-18	FY 18-19	FY 19-20	FY 20-21	Totals
Budget	£2,010m	£2,231m	£2,469m	£2,467m	£9,177m
Spend	£1,586m	£1,738m	£1,919m	£1,863m	£7,106m
Returned £	£424m	£493m	£550m	£604	£2,071m
Returned %	21%	22%	22%	24%	23%

Source: DfE Freedom of Information request (Camden 2022)

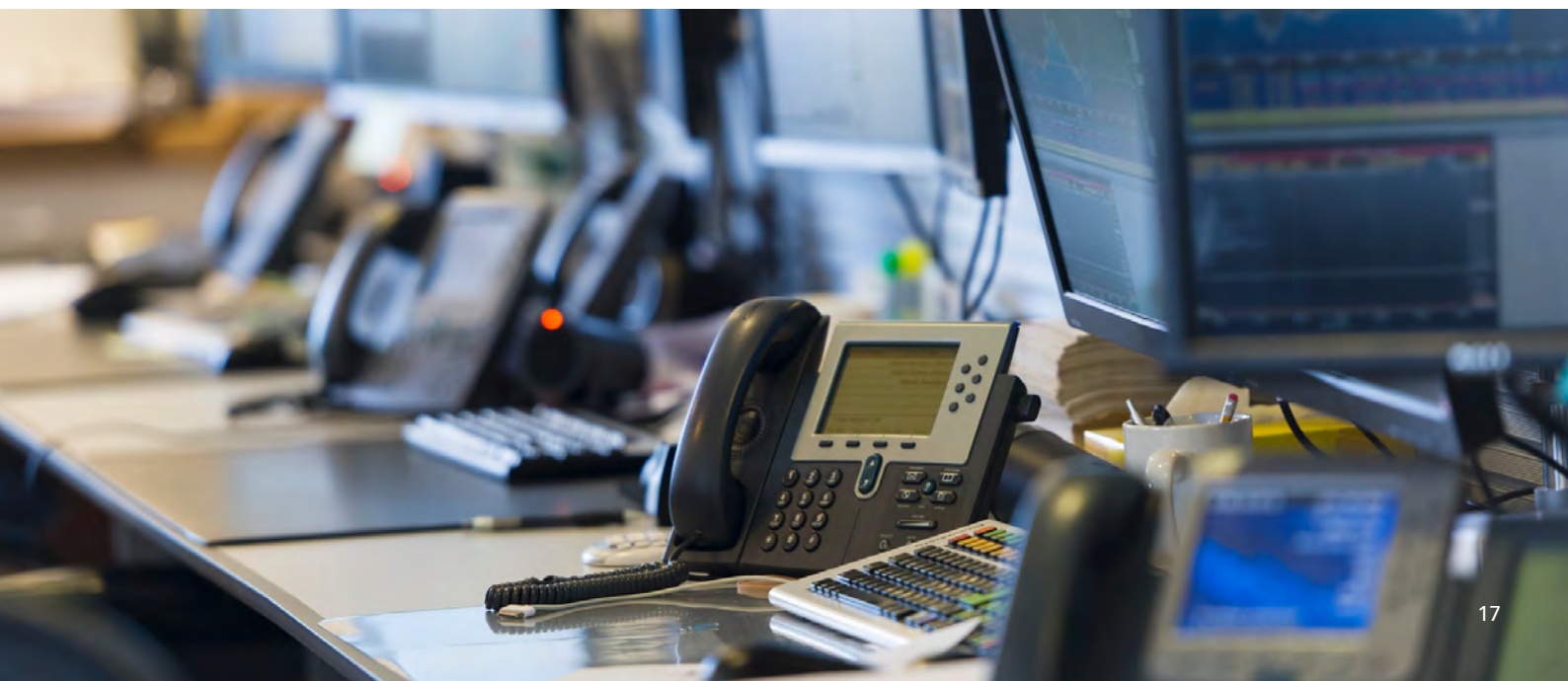
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Recommendation 2: A baseline assessment of career guidance and support available across England

High-quality careers guidance is key to ensuring that both individuals and employers are able to find and access the provision that can help meet their needs. This advice must be available to individuals of any age, and at any stage in their career, whether seeking to reach the next level in their current career or change direction into a new area.

At present, there are various sources of careers guidance and support for individuals across England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. Some of the support and advice is provided by public sector organisations while other forms are provided by private and third-sector organisations. Below are examples of the current sources of careers guidance available (this is not an exhaustive list).

- **National Careers Service:** this government-funded service is available across England. Individuals can access career profiles, explore different paths, find training options, and speak to a qualified adviser by phone or online chat (England only).
- **Skills Development Scotland:** for residents of Scotland, Skills Development Scotland offers careers advice, skills assessments and training information (Scotland only).
- **Careers Wales:** in Wales, Careers Wales provides resources and support for career planning and development (Wales only).
- **Working Wales:** providing support and advice, as well as access to training to help get individuals into work (Wales only).
- **ConnectNI:** this Northern Irish platform offers careers information, advice and resources for individuals at all stages throughout their careers (Northern Ireland only).
- **Jobcentre plus:** providing access to resources, advice and job search help.
- **Council-led careers advice:** provides advice and access to resources for individuals within specific council areas.
- **Careers guidance in schools, colleges, universities and from training providers:** these organisations provide careers guidance to students, often involving access to careers advisers, online resources, work experience opportunities and visits from employers.
- **Professional bodies and industry associations:** professional bodies and industry associations offer careers guidance and resources specific to their sector.
- **Charities and private sector organisations:** a wide range of charities, social enterprises and private sector organisations provide careers advice and support to individuals.



3. POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

While there are a vast range of sources of careers guidance and support across the UK, employers and individuals have expressed concern and frustration about the fragmented nature of support, with varying levels of availability to individuals from different backgrounds, regions and sectors. Feedback from across our network indicates that the quality of advice and support also varies: for example, council-led careers services often encourage individuals seeking careers guidance to take up potentially short-term roles such as warehousing or roles within emerging sectors at a local level. This can lead to a deepening of the skills gaps facing employers, as some professions or sectors may get missed and left behind.

ACCA would strongly support a government-led baseline assessment of the career guidance and support available across England. This exercise would primarily be aimed at developing a deeper understanding of the careers support currently available, identifying best practice and areas where individuals or sectors are currently under-represented, particularly in new or emerging sectors.

This assessment could take the form of a government consultation, inviting both public and private sector organisations that currently provide careers guidance and advice to submit evidence related to the types of support they provide, the ways in which they measure success in providing this support, and case studies linked to success. It would be helpful to compare results gathered from social mobility ‘cold spots’ as identified in *The Employer Index Report* with other parts of the England (Social Mobility Foundation 2023). ACCA would be happy to support a baseline assessment of this kind, using our networks wherever helpful.

This recommendation is specifically about career guidance and support in England, recognising that Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland have separate approaches and governance. Nonetheless, we believe that all four nations of the UK could benefit from enhanced sharing of data and insight into career guidance support approaches and examples of best practice, as well as ensuring that different approaches are easy to navigate for employers operating on a UK-wide basis.



4. Benefits to the UK economy



4. BENEFITS TO THE UK ECONOMY

The Augar review of education and its funding highlighted a range of challenges presented by the lack of flexibility in the current funding system, making it challenging for providers to match provision to the needs of employers and individual learners (Augar 2019). Organisations of all sizes, but particularly small and medium-sized ones, also express frustration at the complexity of the current funding system and the lack of support available to manage the process of accessing funding.

We believe that, taken together, the policy recommendations set out in this paper can support organisations across the UK with attracting, retaining and upskilling new and existing talent, and ultimately move towards narrowing of skills gaps across fast-evolving employment areas. In addition to driving international competitiveness for the UK, this would support individuals from all backgrounds by enhancing the range of upskilling and reskilling opportunities offered by employers.

Individual learners face significant challenges in navigating a complex education landscape. They must make various choices when seeking to upskill or to reskill into new areas, which can lead many to disengage from the education system. An inputs-based baseline assessment of career guidance and support currently available across England would provide the government with the data needed to improve the careers guidance and support available to individuals. This would help ensure that individuals across all levels of existing qualifications and experience are supported in jointly, with their employers, driving forward their careers and development.



5. Role of chartered professional bodies

5. Role of chartered professional bodies

Chartered professional member bodies such as ACCA offer access to a vast range of training courses and qualifications, which have been developed with employers to ensure that the content is both relevant and practical. This approach also ensures that employers can quickly use the skills gained. Continuing professional development and lifelong learning are core in all professions and enable their members to ensure they continue to enhance the value they deliver in a constantly changing economic environment. Our members support individuals across organisations of all sizes seeking to improve their employees' skills and access the talent they need to grow and prosper.

ACCA is committed to developing a skilled workforce (ACCA n.d.) and brings a global perspective to national challenges by:

- advising on fair and inclusive educational policies, funding models and vocational routes
- providing market-leading expertise on the finance and accounting capabilities and qualifications required of a skilled workforce

- sharing our experience of successful initiatives that have bridged national skills gaps in finance and accountancy
- drawing on our global community to facilitate connections that contribute to driving forward national skill agendas.

As a chartered professional body, we are committed to acting in the public interest through all our work. We are committed to working in partnership with government to share our knowledge and expertise and ensure that individuals from all backgrounds have the opportunity to realise their potential and contribute to closing employment skills gaps.

Courses run by professional bodies can offer exceptional value for money, granting learners the option of beginning continuous learning journeys with initial funding support, and of continuing to achieve professional qualified status.

ACCA's founding principles are based on access for all, regardless of age, background or prior skill level. In 1909 Ethe Ayres Purdie became an ACCA member, the first woman to belong to a professional accountancy body. Inclusion, integrity and innovation are our core values – for this reason, we support a range of learning routes to improve accessibility to adult education. This can include flexible study options such as:

- self-study, fitting around existing commitments
- online or face-to-face structured forms of study
- demonstrating competency on the job
- asynchronous learning.

We work with a large network of learning providers that support learners and employers with this activity across the UK.

We are committed to improving social mobility in professional accountancy and contributing to building a more equitable future for all. In 2017, Access Accountancy, a group of professional accountancy firms and bodies, of which ACCA is a member, together with The Bridge Group, a social mobility research charity, produced a report that analysed socio-economic diversity data from almost 140,000 school leaver and graduate applicants to the profession. The report found that 40% of applicants had parents with no higher education experience and that 76% attended publicly funded state education (as opposed to fee-paying schools) (ACCA 2018). Professional associations have a central role in addressing access to opportunity issues for the benefit of broader society.

Acknowledgments

With sincere thanks to the stakeholders below.

- **Caroline Henderson**, EY
- **Stacey Burns**, EY
- **Shabbir Somani**, EY
- **Jared Davies**, University of South Wales
- **Nicola Gilbert**, University of South Wales
- **Gareth John**, First Intuition
- **Katharina Ehrhart**, Financial Services Skills Commission
- **Tim Kelland**, Welsh NHS Executive
- **Catherine Phillips**, Cardiff and Vale University Health Board
- **Elisa Henderson**, Johnston Carmichael
- **Laura Wilson**, Skills Development Scotland
- **Abigail Kinsella**, Skills Development Scotland



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